# MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER

Dody —

Now that you have
a boy I know that
you will need this.

love from

Pone.

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

---

HOME FIRES IN FRANCE.
THE BENT TWIG.
THE SQUIRREL-CAGE.
HILLSBORO PEOPLE with occasional Vermont verses by SARAH N. CLEGHORN.

THE REAL MOTIVE.
UNDERSTOOD BETSY.
A MONTESSORI MOTHER. Illustrated.

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN.

(with SARAH N. CLEGHORN)
FELLOW CAPTAINS.

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# MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

By

DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER

AUTHOR OF "A MONTESSORI MOTHER," ETC.

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## PREFACE

I WAS a freshman at college before I ever heard the story of Goldsmith and Ezekiel, and one of my most vivid recollections is of my perplexity as I watched the amused face of the young assistant in the English Department, who told it to us. He had been speaking of the boundless naïveté of the great writer's character, and, prefacing the story with a laugh, related the anecdote as follows: "One day Goldsmith, chancing to turn over the leaves of the Bible, happened upon the book of Ezekiel. He was soon deep in reading, and no one saw him at all that day; but that evening he burst into the weekly gathering of his circle at the King's Head, still clad in his careless morning costume, the book in his hand, his finger between the pages to keep the place, his honest face on fire with enthusiasm. To everyone in turn he addressed himself with the greatest ardor, crying out, 'Why did I never hear of this writer before? He is a superb master, this Ezekiel—only listen to this passage! And this! And what nobility in this eighteenth chapter!'

"As he ran here and there, among those of Dr. Johnson's circle, and others who chanced to be at the tavern that night, buttonholing men of letters

and of science, opening his book under the nose of a distinguished clergyman and reading aloud with gestures of astonished admiration, the great Dr. Johnson, observing him, asked a nearby friend: 'Pray, sir, what so excites our good Goldy to--night?' Garrick overheard the question and, bursting into a fit of laughter, replied: 'Why, Dr. Johnson, at forty years of age Goldsmith has discovered Ezekiel!'"

The professor stopped and laughed; and with the pliability of youth, the class before him laughed in chorus. I myself laughed with the rest, but I laughed from sheer moral cowardice, for I had not found the story at all funny: Like Goldsmith, I had lived my life till then and had known nothing of Ezekiel beyond his name at the top of unread pages. And although I laughed, I hung my head.

Of course, as soon as the class was dismissed I went and looked up Ezekiel in the Bible and read with astonishment and delight the splendid passages in the eighteenth chapter; but this tardy knowledge seemed to me but scant atonement for my former ignorance. It was only when I discovered a classmate (one among those who had laughed loudest at Goldsmith's simplicity) also surreptitiously investigating Ezekiel that a gleam of light filtered into my discouragement; and later, when tactful questioning of my other classmates revealed the fact that not one of them had ever read a word of Ezekiel, I was able once more to hold up my head.

The small incident stuck in my memory, and as my capacity for reflection unfolded itself, it became, little by little, the peg on which many of my reflections were hung. Almost at once it occurred to me that, no matter how ridiculous he might have seemed to his enlightened contemporaries, I personally owed Goldsmith a debt of gratitude for having directed my attention to a noble piece of ethical thought; but I was graduated from college before I awoke to the hilarious probability that it was more than likely that some of the very men whom Goldsmith had buttonholed on that evening had been as ignorant of Ezekiel as the class of school-children, almost two hundred years later. I had a delighted and amused mental picture of bewigged and beribboned great gentlemen trying to be genteelly casual, as they sought information on the subject from their clerical acquaintances. And upon that idea I rounded the corner suddenly into another conception, namely, that possibly the curates and clergymen themselves, though they had read Ezekiel, never, until Goldsmith simple-mindedly pointed it out, had been aware of the eloquence of the ancient Hebrew.

Ever since then Goldsmith and Ezekiel have been to me the figures in a fable, under the humorous guise of which I have seen embodied Eternal Truth and her discovery by the succeeding generations. And thus I am encouraged now to assume the slightly ludicrous rôle of the unconscious Goldsmith, crying out in simple-hearted interest and enthusiasm over

the discovery of principles as old as the human mind which still are the only solutions for the problems of domestic life to-day. For it is to be remembered that my generation, that every generation, is not ancient like most of the problems which it faces. No one is born with a knowledge of Ezekiel, and every generation is apt to see the cosmos only as a newly-fused chaos of needs and obligations. Every troubled thinker must be reassured anew of the existence of fundamental laws. Every anxious heart must have a first blessed experience of beating higher at the first knowledge of the world-old answers which solve so perfectly the latest riddles of our age, of every age.

I am even more encouraged to have out my simple say, though the wise ones of the older generation may greet it with a good-natured smile, because it seems to me that I belong to a class and address myself to a class of people who, until very lately, have been rather oddly overlooked by educational writers. There has been a curious division of humanity into those who had children to bring up, and so had no time to theorize about their job, and those who had no children, and so had time and strength to puzzle out and put together, for the benefit of savants like themselves, some general laws underlying the undertaking. There have been but few writers on education and its theories who have troubled themselves to address their wise remarks expressly to the untutored minds of us mothers and fathers. And

yet, who can need advice more than we? For, although we have been astonished, delighted, and intoxicated at finding ourselves in the business of rearing children, most of us have been equally aghast at the realization that we have not made the slightest preparation for what is avowedly the most difficult, complicated, and important enterprise in human life. Entirely unacquainted with the bibliography of our new subject, we have not known where to turn among the weighty volumes of the learned. The few times we have summoned the courage to read scientific discussions of the theory of education, we have generally found them too abstruse for our untrained powers of concentration, scattered and depressed as these are by what Hardy calls picturesquely "the muck and muddle of rearing children."

It is true that the number of books on teaching is beyond any calculation. A partial list of the titles is enough to stagger any humble-minded non-professional seeker after hints and suggestions. But even if some conscientious father or mother should get through all the books on professional education, much would still be lacking. Teachers and parents are quite different people, with different functions. Home-life and schoolroom-life are not identical, by any means. *Teachers do not have to live with the children.* Methods which are suited to the schoolroom, where there are none but children and an adult whose entire business is to take care of them, are not in the least available in the average American

home as it exists at the present day, partly old and partly modern, with a crying need for the mother to be many other things than mother alone, if the poise and moral equilibrium of family life are to be preserved.

There is little in the following pages about how to induce the child to acquire information, or even how to teach him to use his mind for study. As things are now organized in America, most of us depend upon professional teachers to give that important training to our children. The homely essays which follow are the meditations of one now struggling with the problem of just how to keep on decent terms with the children, how best to live with them, how to adjust our lives to theirs so that there shall be enduring harmony, peace, and good-will in the family, how modern fathers and mothers of modern children may preserve their own self-respect and the respect of the children, and conduct a family life which shall be in tune with the best of modern thought.

I base my sole hope of being useful on the fact that not infrequently a fresh presentation by a contemporary of an old principle shows it set in such an angle that application of it to everyday life seems a more possible affair. Therein lies a certain excuse for the much-condemned reading by each generation of the mediocre writings of its own age, rather than the finer works of other centuries. Furthermore, human relationships, though eternal and immortal,

pass through many changes of outward aspect, calculated to perplex to the uttermost those who are struggling to deal honestly and intelligently with them. The relation of husbands to wives is not the same as it was before the feminist movement. Whether we are feminists ourselves or not, we must admit that. And the relation of parent to child has undergone very many unacknowledged transformations since the great modern movements of child-study and child-conservation. Many of the old-time solutions of domestic difficulties which we are advised to use by our elders will not work for us, because since they were in force the whole fabric of society has altered, and now casts into the home a new, disquieting reflection of innovation. Parental expedients for meeting crises in child-life which served every purpose two generations ago are almost pitiably inadequate at present.

There is nothing for us to do but to acknowledge that things have changed, and that if we are to be enlightened and just in our treatment of the children, we shall have to do some fresh thinking on the subject.

We do not need new principles. For that matter, there are no new principles. Like everyone else facing new conditions, we need to go back to the oldest of general theories for our guides. We must try to see what truths about humanity and society have been found most enduring and comforting and worth preserving, and then to try to apply them

honestly to the changed family life of the present day.

About half the articles which follow appeared in a much abridged form in *To-day's Magazine*. With little notion that they contained anything of more than passing interest, I was astonished by the number of letters they called out, and by the surprise which the application of old principles of social living to contemporary domestic problems seemed to awaken in many readers. All this has heartened me to imitate the simplicity of Goldsmith and, regardless of sly laughs from the learned and sophisticated, to cry aloud with interest and relief my artless discovery of certain great and age-old paths of equity and justice which to-day, as always, may be of comfort and aid in the labyrinth of a parent's life.

# CONTENTS


PAGE

PREFACE . . . . . v

## THE BACKGROUND OF OUR CHILDREN'S LIVES

MORAL SUNSHINE . . . . . 3
THE INVOLUNTARY ZULU . . . . . 15
MORAL THERMOMETERS . . . . . 31
ANSWERING THE CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS . . . 51
A FAIR DIVISION OF THE HOME . . . . . 62
ON NOT TAKING THE CHILDREN TOO SERIOUSLY . 82

## OBEDIENCE

A SLIDING-SCALE FOR OBEDIENCE . . . . 97
OBEDIENCE AS A TRANSITIVE VERB . . . . 111
THE CHILD AS PHILOSOPHER . . . . . 126
THE OLD AUTHORITY INEFFECTIVE . . . . 143
ONE KEY FOR ALL LOCKS . . . . . 155
KENNETH AND HIS MOTHER . . . . . 163

## THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT FOR MOTHERS

OBSERVATION . . . . . 171
ROOM TO GROW IN . . . . . 187

## ON JOINING THE OLDER GENERATION

THE DILEMMA OF THE MODERN PARENT . . 197
THE USE OF INSIGHT . . . . . 217
DISCARDING THE PRETENSE OF OMNISCIENCE . . 229

## MATERNITY NO LONGER A POSITION FOR LIFE

WHEN WE ARE GRANDMOTHERS . . . . 245
A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE . . . . . 263

# THE BACKGROUND OF OUR CHILDREN'S LIVES

## MORAL SUNSHINE

The inner and unconscious ideals of the parents are what teach the child; their remonstrances, their punishments, even their bursts of emotion, are to him but thunder and comedy; what they worship is what he desires and reflects.—*Amiel's Journal.*

A FEELING very nearly akin to despair is apt to overcome the modern parent when he begins to try to learn something of what experts are saying and writing about education and child-training. At his first step into the new field, where he seeks illumination, he finds himself strained in an unavailing effort to catch a few explicit words of wisdom. There is such an intense difference of opinion among professional educators about the right methods to use that the parent is tempted to feel that his effort to enlighten himself has but increased his bewilderment. Without the requisite training or information to judge for himself, it seems to him that if the educational experts disagree so heartily, there is little chance that anyone will know the truth. If they do not know, who can know, what is necessary in school discipline, or the age at which arithmetic should be begun, or whether co-education in high-schools is advisable, or the proper methods of teaching hygiene, or the relative advantages of vocational and purely academic training?

And yet, in spite of this difference of opinion among school authorities, we Americans have the fixed habit, when it comes to formal intellectual instruction, of turning our children, almost without exception, over to the existing school system. Our faith in it, surviving the attacks of innumerable critics, appears to be unshaken. At least when September comes, we send off our boys and girls to their classes with unvarying regularity, although nowadays not always without heartfelt prayers that the schools may somehow chance to be better than their critics claim.

The basis for this curious, traditional American faith in schools is often the subject of learned comment and discussion, but it occurs to me, looking at the matter from the parent's point of view, that possibly it is not so significant as it seems. It may very well be that we continue faithfully to send our children to school in spite of the frequent and picturesque attacks on that institution because we have a more or less conscious grasp of the fact that in most cases it is not the child's school, but his home, which determines what sort of child he shall be. It may be that we more or less consciously discern that character and not information is the important factor in the training of children, and that for the formation of character school influences are nothing compared to home influences. In any case, whether we know what we are doing or not, that is the clew most of us are following through the labyrinth. And

it is our very own clew, with which educational experts have nothing to do. The responsibility of it rests upon our shoulders, and it is the greatest responsibility any human being can have. If our children are provided with the right sort of home background, the queerest of experimental school-education will do them no harm; and if their roots are set in the wrong kind of home soil, no amount of expert educational pruning and trimming and training will make them what they ought to be.

It is a providential thing that the question of the sort of home background which our children shall have is as much within our control as it is vital. And yet there is no axiom the truth of which is harder for us to realize. Our instinct is to cry out that what with enormous rents, high prices for clothes, beefsteak at goodness knows what a pound, domestic help unattainable, and hard times hovering ominously near, nothing is more tragically out of our control than the home background. But the fact remains, apprehended by us in our better moments, that with some few exceptions the real essentials of a sane, wholesome, active, and happy life for the children lie easily within our reach. There are, of course, families in the congested portions of city tenement districts who cannot (to the shame of our country be it said) command the conditions necessary for proper moral and physical child-life and child-growth, and there are some other families who are prevented from providing the right back-

ground by confirmed ill-health or desperate misfortune; but it is safe to say that ninety-nine out of every hundred of us can by taking thought (the *right kind of thought*) provide our children with the essentials for normal and healthy growth to their full stature. By all means, therefore, let us take thought, but first let us be sure that we are taking "the right kind of thought." Let us clarify our minds as to our real purpose, let us question ourselves seriously about the home we are providing for our children. What ought we to furnish then if we are not to fail in our duty towards them? In the case of infants under a year, modern science, good doctors, and sensible trained nurses, all banging together at our hard heads for the last twenty years, have given us a big lift up out of the abysmal confusion of mind which afflicted the views of our grandmothers on the subject of babies. We know now that if we happen to have plenty of money, time, and strength, it is all very well to amuse ourselves by embroidering the baby's petticoats and trimming the little caps with ribbon, but that these fascinating occupations have nothing whatever to do with the welfare of the child, and are simply done to please ourselves. We now know that the baby needs and must have, though the Heavens fall, clean milk—absolutely clean milk—sterilized nursing bottles, and warm feet—conditions which can be supplied as well in a gypsy encampment as in the palace of a king.

But in the case of older children we have not as yet so clearly in our heads the equally vital difference between the essentials of moral and intellectual life and those trimmings and embroideries of existence which our own vanity is always driving us on to obtain for our boys and girls. We do not with sufficient vividness understand that for them the essentials are not handsome nurseries, clothes-in-fashion, expensive schooling, well-to-do playmates, a plethora of toys, a succession of costly "amusements," or a life of physical ease—all conditions which (luckily for the children) are out of the reach of most of us. The real essentials, which any of us can have by taking thought, are peace and harmony among the adults of the family; an atmosphere of purposeful cheerful industry and clear-sightedness towards the children; and for them a life of intellectual freedom and physical activity. Now these conditions can be secured in a little five-room house, in any moderate-sized American town or village, or in the country, as easily as in a millionaire's mansion. Self-indulgence and laziness certainly can be discouraged more easily by the example of adults who expect, as a matter of course, to do a reasonable amount of real work themselves than by any amount of verbal exhortation or "manual training" in an atmosphere where the adults expect, as a matter of course, to do nothing but what pleases them.

It is only fair to admit that these right conditions are not easily to be secured anywhere in the world.

They are possessions too precious to be gained without effort. But the fact that they can be secured by almost any of us who is willing to put himself out enough to secure them throws on us the blame if our children grow up without having experienced these inestimable blessings. Inestimable blessings they are, and their absence is an inestimable handicap. They are desirable for adults, but for children they are essential, just as fresh milk, clean dishes, and warm feet are good for adults, but vitally essential for babies. To be sure, some babies do worry along on fly-infected milk and filthy nipples, but they grow up into adults with ruined digestions and lowered vitality. So in a home where irritability reigns, where the adults practice self-indulgence as consistently as their incomes will allow, and deal justly with the children whenever they happen not to feel too tired and nervous to do so, the children do grow up somehow, but they grow up with warped and crooked moral natures into one or another of the various life-failures so tragically common.

Luckily most mothers are not looking for the easy way to bring up their children, but are searching for the best way with whole-hearted fervor. They are not prevented by selfishness from giving their children what is best for them, but only by dire confusion of mind,—like the tired young mother who sat on my porch the other day, making tucks by hand in her little girl's dress until she was so worn out with eye-strain and fatigue that she slapped the

child for unintentionally overturning a vase of flowers! In these enlightened days, of course, few of us slap our children to relieve our own nervous tension, but do we not allow ourselves to become so tired and harried by life that we are almost constantly out of sympathy with, for instance, the natural instinct of children for incessant activity? Are we not always telling our children to "keep still" or "do be quiet" or not to "litter up the house so" or "don't do that" simply because their blessedly healthful busyness with its consequent noise is the last straw for our overstrained nerves? For all this there is no possible excuse. When we undertake the care of children we bind ourselves (no matter what other activities may suffer) not to allow our nerves to become overstrained. We must not be irritable or unjust or unintelligent—not even once. We must keep ourselves in a general condition of clear-headed sanity and sound nervous health, which enables us, for instance, to distinguish rationally between childish acts which are really naughty and those which are merely inconvenient for the adult routine. We must keep well enough and self-controlled enough and happy enough ourselves (for our happiness depends ultimately on the state of our own hearts) to set a constant example of sunny acceptance of life,—even in the face of the constant minor annoyances which make up the common lot. The very fact that Heaven has granted us children for whose sake to make these efforts towards poise and intelligence is

reward enough for any sacrifices we may have to make of our moral laziness and egotism.

Everything else is of less importance for children than the color of the home background. The family can live on oatmeal porridge three times a day, the children can go with holes in their stockings, and with uncombed hair; the house can be unswept, the beds unmade; the mother can dress in a cheap print wrapper—any of the dreadful things we usually think of as "impossible" are infinitely better for the children's moral health and present and future happiness and usefulness than a mother constantly scolding to let off the steam of her bad temper, or repressing unjustly the innocent activities of her children.

Fortunately few of us have to make so decisive and radical a choice as this between over-fatigue and actual slovenliness. But every one of us, if we have children to bring up, and have our wits and consciences in good working order, must make some such choice every day. None of us can have everything. When we have only ourselves to choose for, we are responsible only to ourselves if we choose badly and select the trivial, superficial goods of life, such as fashionable clothes, elaborate food, or social excitement, and deny ourselves the greater goods, such as peace of mind, intellectual growth, content of heart, and leisure to savor the sweetness of life. But when we have childen, ah, then we are responsible for our choice to God, to society, and to our own souls! We must not, we dare not, choose badly. First of

all, we must have the essentials to feed our children's hearts and minds, and then, when these are provided for, we may be permitted to spend whatever superfluous strength, money, and time we have on embroidering their petticoats and trimming their caps. Before the children come into our lives we may, at no more cost than the sacrifice of our own characters and happiness, indulge ourselves in pulling and hauling with our husbands over minor differences of opinion, in snappish replies to remarks that seem irritating at the end of a hard day's work, in fits of bilious gloom over poverty, hard work, or (more likely) over nothing at all; in bitter exasperation at the perversity of inanimate objects, in vexation over the annoying personal peculiarities of the adult members of the household, in repining at the necessity for doing useful work. But when children live with us all this must stop, or we shall be guilty of perhaps the worst crime possible—of poisoning a child's life. Adjusting oneself to the equal partnership of marriage is difficult enough, but to bring up children is to assume the awful responsibility of an absolute ruler, upon the sagacity of whose edicts depend the success and happiness of the dearest objects of his affection.

It is hard to stop these bad habits,—it is hard, like everything else that is worth doing, but it must be done. It is also difficult to provide absolutely clean milk for babies, and yet society is more and more passionately setting itself at this task. Perhaps the

moral problem may be simplified if we borrow for it some of the rational habits of thought which modern hygiene is teaching us about physical health. Nowadays, when we wake up in the morning with a bad taste in our mouths and no appetite for a wholesome breakfast, we do not complain that it is an inscrutable sending of Providence or an inevitable result of our unsatisfactory or unhappy lives. The fact that some other people are more fortunate than we, we know perfectly well, has nothing whatever to do with the matter. We know that it is caused by indulgence in something indigestible the day before or by eating when too fatigued or by being angry after the meal. Similarly when we hear ourselves replying in an aggrieved tone to an unfortunate but well-meant remark by a fellow-inmate of the house or feeling a disinclination to do our share of the day's necessary routine, when we find ourselves showing bad temper over a mishap due to some child's unintentional mistake, when we reprove a son or daughter in an angry voice or see that we are disseminating an atmosphere of dreary gloom over the household, we ought to ask ourselves just as definitely, as in the case of physical indigestion, what imprudent indulgences we have been allowing to upset our moral health,—what is wrong with our moral way of life, in short. It is ignoble to creep behind the self-pitying excuse of a life so hard that we cannot keep good-natured and clear-headed under its burdens. Who makes it hard? Do we not our-

selves make it hard by straining so fiercely after the various trimmings of life that we are too tired to enjoy the radiant, satisfying, easily gained essentials?

What are the homes where children love to visit? The grand ones, full of servants and idleness, and exquisite breakable bric-à-brac, and elaborate toys, where everyone is dressed finely from morning to night, and where no one must be boisterous and nothing can be touched? Any healthy child would, if the chance were given him, run with all his might from a home of that sort to a low-ceilinged farmhouse, full of plain, hardworking, good-natured people, busy with interesting undertakings, but not too busy to allow a child to "look on" or even help. And yet, consciously or unconsciously, the model on which we are endeavoring to form our own homes is the first and not the second of these types. As much as our resources will allow us, we try to make our homes resemble the "grand home."

Let us understand honestly the reason for this tendency of our endeavor. Let us without illusion face the fact that when we drain our pocketbooks and exhaust our nervous strength to supply our children with good clothes and elaborate desserts and well-furnished houses, we are forcing on them not what is good for them or what they in any way need, but what our own moral cowardice needs to protect us against our neighbor's opinion of us. Other people's children have patent-leather shoes, and so must ours, though we lie awake nights worrying over the small-

ness of our income,—and because of those sleepless hours snap at the children's questions next morning.

It is easy to assent to an elevated generality, but hard to stick to one's principles among the details of daily life. The best possible prop to a good resolution is a full, clear statement of what it means to the maker in detailed practice. Every family, and especially every child in the country, would be happier and healthier if the house-mother would hang up over her work table, and read every morning some such confession of faith as this:

"I OWE A DEBT TO MY CHILDREN. Having brought them into the world, their father and I owe it to them to furnish them a happy, free life of physical health, cheerful industry, intellectual growth, and moral dignity and sanity. To pay my part of this debt I have at my command a certain amount of money, physical strength, intellectual vigor, nervous energy, and spiritual force. If I am to keep my honor untarnished I must, as every honest debtor does, use my resources *first of all* to keep up the payments on my debt."

By the uncompromising clarity of such a statement the house-mother must test her daily life. Does she plan new clothes for herself or for the children, new curtains for the parlor, membership in a bridge club, jelly-making, an elaborate birthday party? Let her count the probable cost in effort of the proposed undertaking and ask herself: "Can I really afford it?"

## THE INVOLUNTARY ZULU

By taking the trouble to speak with precision one gains the habit of thinking rightly.—CONDILLAC.

NOT long ago I was absorbed in a book on anthropology, when a small boy cousin about four years old came running into the room and after a little hesitation stationed himself in front of me. I looked up to see what he wanted, had a pair of rubbers thrust into my face, and heard Jack say in a loud, hard tone of command: "Put my rubbers on, why don't ye?" I felt an irritable desire to retaliate for the rudeness and said, with the cheap and easy irony of an adult towards a child at fault: "Why, of course, Jack; I only live to wait on you."

There was a long silence as I tugged at the minute rubbers. Then I leaned back in my chair and took up my book again. The child stood for a moment hanging his head until finally with a sigh he walked soberly out of the room, all the sunshine gone from his face.

I was in the middle of a very interesting chapter on the language of savages, in the course of which the author dealt vividly with the curious limitations of speech among primitive peoples. I was surprised at the great importance this scientist attributed to

the matter of language. He said, and proved, that many simple ideas cannot be conceived by savages, not because their brains are congenitally insufficient, but because they have no words for ideas. For instance, they may have words which mean "water-in-the-pail" or "water-steaming-over-the-fire" or "water-in-the-river," but absolutely no word for the simple abstraction "water," and hence (this was the point on which my scientist laid such stress) no conception of that simple abstraction. In Zulu there are words for "my-father," "his-or-her-father," "your-father," "their-father," "the-father-who-is-not-here," etc., all cumbersome polysyllables, without any element in common; and yet not a Zulu alive could express in his native tongue the simple idea of "father," an abstraction so simple that any child could conceive it.

This principle laboriously applied to the whole vocabulary means that instead of a liberating medium for self-expression as a language should be, the speech of the Zulus consists of prison bars, shutting their thoughts inexorably into the narrow confines of the concrete. The tongue of the Zulus does not only not express their ideas, it slams a trap-door down on the head of any thought which might try to emerge from the dead-level of the most primitive experience. The author of the book ended this chapter with a statement of the marvelous advance in civilization when savages are provided with a more adequate language, and made an eloquent plea to all civilized

nations in charge of primitive races to aid the advance of these simple people by taking away their clumsy, inexpressive language, and laying before their feet the clear, straight path of a modern analytic tongue.

I laid down my book to meditate on this (to me) entirely new and surprisingly high valuation of language as an actual aid to mental and moral growth, and caught sight of Jack moping forlornly on the front walk, making a pretense of playing with his bow and arrow. Perhaps it was the sight of these weapons, reminding me of the savages of whom I had been reading, perhaps my affection for the little fellow gave me a moment of divination of his heart, —in any case I thrilled with the exciting experience of a brand-new idea. What are children if not primitive people for whose intellectual advance we civilized adults have the responsibility? I leaned to the open window and called the child in. He stubbed along listlessly. "Jack," I asked, "what does Maida say to you when she asks you to do something?" Jack is being brought up under the nurse-maid system. Maida is the name of his kindly, German-American, warm-hearted nurse-girl.

Jack stared at me blankly, evidently not understanding my question. I repeated it in a simpler form: "Why, when she wants you to take off your coat, what does she say?"

Jack's reply opened wide the door of comprehension for me. "She says," the little boy quoted the

phrase and intonation with loud, ready confidence, " she says, ' Take off yer coat, why don't ye? ' "

From the pages of the serious, scholarly book on my lap, treating of the linguistic peculiarities of howling savages in Borneo and Africa, there poured a sudden illuminating light upon the unhappy little twentieth-century boy at my knee, misunderstandingly blamed for something over which he has as little control as over the clothes on his back. His family take him to the best clothier in town for his coats and trousers; but the ready-made language in which he is expected to clothe his ideas and feelings is the most grotesque misfit for the dawning impulses and aspirations of his sensitive baby-nature. It is as though he were required to stumble about in the cast-off clothes of a Bowery tough, and then blamed because he did not present a neat appearance, and had not a quick, alert gait. For his is not even Maida's language, although he learns it from her. She is being just as much misrepresented as Jack is. Her foster-mother-country has taken no pains to provide her with a language which shall suitably express her gentle, loving heart. In her native German, very likely she has half-a-dozen comely phrases to choose from when she wishes to make a request; but her English vocabulary, grammar, and intonation (the last the worst of all) were learned of her sister's slangy, East-side, janitor-husband, and Maida is as helplessly bound down by its limitations as a savage by his bungling language. And she is passing this

meager, poverty-stricken, unlovely Zulu-talk on to our Jack!

For while it is true that he does not associate exclusively with Maida, she it is who is with him at the important hours when something is happening to him, when his attention is fixed on the words being used, when he is having his bath or his dinner or being dressed or put to bed. The talk of the rest of the family is to him more or less as stilted "book-talk" is to us, while Maida's speech is the honest, simple language of everyday wants, to be used in ordinary life.

I took the little boy up on my lap, holding him in a remorsefully close embrace, and, calling down silent blessings on the anthropological gentleman who from his distant, book-lined workroom had forced an idea into my dense adult head, I reviewed the little scene in the new light of understanding, and perceived not only its significance, but that of a hundred other similar scenes with little children in which I had played the same obtuse rôle, as wholly muddle-headed as the poor children themselves, helplessly unable to make out what the trouble is, and only dully aware that they are not happy. Jack had come running in, looking for someone to help him on with his rubbers so that he could go out for a much-coveted hour of play with a new toy. I had been so much absorbed in my book that, in a dumb misery, the little Zulu had wandered about the prison-like limitations of the only language he knows.

He had tried to think of some " nice " way to attract my attention, feeling with an instinctively courteous impulse the ugliness of the only phrase which was familiar to him; and then, helplessly, he had blurted it out just as we had allowed him to learn it,—and because he had been blamed for it, his hour of play had been clouded.

Worse, far worse than this temporary misfortune, he had taken another step into the fatal path of a bad habit. Another blow had been added to those which are steadily shaping his responsive little heart to a mood of despairing certainty of being always blamed by adults. By the time he is ten this certainty will have had, in all probability, one of two irrevocable results. Either he will be the tragically shy, bashful little boy we all know, who, through his anguish of self-consciousness, belies his real character pitiably and grotesquely; or he will be the other extreme, the brazen, calloused small boy, who does not care how much he is blamed, and takes good care that there shall be plenty of cause for it.

In either case he himself will suffer from injustice and misunderstanding of his real character, and he will add another one to the already crushingly large majority among our boys and girls who, doomed themselves by adult neglect to primitive and ungracious speech, revenge themselves unconsciously on society by cherishing a tradition of roughness and curtness. This, of course, makes life unhappy for the occasional child brought up with another tradi-

tion. Our adult attitude towards this condition has been curiously like that of the wiseacres a century ago, who predicted dire results of unhappiness if any of the poor were educated, because it would "set them apart from their natural associates," make them "queer" and "different." We feebly admit that it is better for our children to be brutal than to be "different"; as if the only way to avoid ridicule and to attain happiness were to be a safe shade ruder and more ignorant than your associates, and as if there were no way to be natural and unaffected except by being unendurable. We train children to be what they are, and then lay upon this involuntary Zuluism of theirs the blame for our continuing so to train the next generation after them.

For all my remorse I did not try to apologize to Jack—the affair was rather too complicated for a four-year-old brain to understand. I trusted to his blessedly short baby-memory, told him a funny story, gave him a cookie, and sent him laughing and wriggling with animal spirits out to play again. Then I went on thinking. My anthropological friend had started me along a path of reasoning which led to many unexpected conclusions. The cocksure adults in our family had been so positive that Jack, "like all children, is a queer mixture." What was queer—I saw it now—was a mixture that Jack was not responsible for: the unnatural mixture of his gentle, sensitive, "civilized" little natural character and the Zulu language of blunt, curt, inflexible

phrases, to which our unthinking carelessness had condemned him.

And Jack is not the only one. His case is striking because it is extreme, but in this new light it seemed to me that none of the little children I knew, even those who are being cared for by their own mothers, are getting a fair chance. Do their mothers, do I myself in speaking to my much-loved little ones, ever think of softening the thousand little daily frictions and contacts between our personalities by anything remotely resembling the pleasant expressions of ordinary well-bred intercourse. What do I say, for instance, to my baby girl if her chair stands in the way of a door I wish to shut. I say, gently perhaps in manner, but in a phrase of autocratic and absolute command, such as I would never dream of using towards anyone else: "Your chair is in the way, dear. Get up and move it." Why should I not say to her, as I would to any acquaintance: "May I trouble you to move back just a little?" or "Would you mind moving your chair a trifle?" For I am much troubled and distressed when, in her turn, my little girl says to her grandmother: "Your chair is on my dolly's skirt. Get up!" Even if with a wary eye to arbitrary, rule-of-thumb commands about the use of the only two polite words she knows, she adds a dry, impatient, "Please," and yet where did she learn that phrase and accent if not from some request of mine to her?

Now, anyone who has learned a foreign language

knows that it is by infinite repetition that a new phrase is so embedded in the memory as to occur instinctively at a given circumstance. Learning it by heart is not enough. It must be used, and used over and over again in the appropriate circumstances before it becomes automatic. All my foreign friends confirm my own experience that the most painful part of speaking a language imperfectly is the depressing certainty that one's lack of fluency is constantly making one seem discourteous and appear at a disadvantage. It is not enough that Jack, several times a day, shall overhear his mother using good-humored and urbane turns of expression to her adult callers, or even to his father and other members of the family, if he is lucky enough to have a family who habitually speak to each other like civilized beings. The phrases which are stamped on his mind are those which are addressed *to him*. Ought he not to hear over and over again a rich variety of the quaint, mannerly phrases which should make our lives (though they may be no more morally estimable) so much more gracious than that of Maida's sister's janitor-husband?

Why should not the little child, when he wishes to ask a favor of an adult (to continue taking the incident of Jack's rubbers as typical), why should he not find rising readily to his lips such simple, familiar expressions as "Would it bother you too much to do so-and-so for me?" or "Excuse me, may I trouble you to do so-and-so?" or "Won't you

please do so-and-so?" or, in circumstances slightly different, "Would you mind my doing so-and-so?" or "Wouldn't it be nice if we did so-and-so?" or "Wouldn't you like to do so-and-so?" These are not stilted, affected circumlocutions, but the common, everyday expressions of friendly conversations. To teach the little child to use them instinctively and naturally should be as much taken for granted as to teach him to keep his face clean. Neither action can lay claim to any lofty, ethical value beyond that of a comely, becoming, suitable garb, which has, so all of us can testify, an influence on life out of all proportion to its apparent importance. It is simply part of the natural birthright of childhood, and not at all a "dancing-school" training for home-life or a return to eighteenth-century stiffness and formality. There is no need for a little child to rehearse set salutations for strangers, since there should be in his quiet baby-life but few occasions for using these. But the simple phrases which enable him to move easily and naturally, without appearing at a disadvantage, in the ordinary circumstances of his ordinary life, are as commonplace and essential as comfortable, well-fitting clothes, which enable him to move easily and naturally about a room. The difficulty, of course, lies in the fact that no amount of money can buy for a child an outfit of this language of civilized intercourse. Nothing but incessant intercourse with civilized beings can rescue him from linguistic Zululand.

We cannot defend ourselves against this charge of neglect by contending that it is thought and feeling which determine language, and not language which determines thought and feeling, for there are the learned and scientific anthropologists with their deep knowledge of the processes of the human brain and their definite proof that language is so vital an element in life that there are whole races of men whose minds, generation after generation, never rise to their innate capacity, but are cramped and stunted by the insufficience of their medium of expression. Just as there may be language without thought but not thought without language, so there may be surface courtesy without real kindness of heart; but real kindness of heart is often choked back from development by the lack of a habit of easily expressive speech.

It is, moreover, likely that there is here, as so often, an important reflex action from the outer manifestation upon the inner impulse. Professor William James tells us with all the authority of a great scientist, that willfully to whistle gayly when we feel gloomy will actually make us feel more cheerful. All of us know that when we are freshly attired in clean, comely garments, it is easier to be gracious and at ease than when we are muddy or ragged. Does it not seem reasonable that a fixed habit of wearing that other comely garb of courteous, flexible speech would in the case of the child, as of the adult, make it much harder for savage and

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Zulu-like impulses to reach expression? In other words, the habit of good or bad speech is not only important in itself as a means of expressing truthfully the character of the speaker, but is vital because it exercises a real influence on the formation of character. It seems possible that there will be actually less goodness of heart in older life if in early childhood the budding aspirations towards it find no fit means of expression. Those embryonic impulses, hardly recognizable at first and always wholly unself-conscious, if they encounter obstacles, such as misunderstanding and the probability of appearing ridiculous, may never again in the lifetime of that individual have any but a spasmodically galvanized and intermittent existence.

The vital point which we are too apt to overlook is that this irrevocable mark may be (and probably is) set on the individual at a very early age, at the time of the first appearance of the first manifestation of the universal human impulse towards civilization. The bud on a tiny year-old apple-tree is only a little knot of brown fiber, not so large as one's finger-tip, but if it be broken off no power on earth will ever enable that tree to put out a branch again at that spot.

Nor do the little ones need only a more adequate vocabulary of courtesy, a command of those words which are in daily family intercourse what cushions and springs are in travel,—" shock-absorbers " the automobile-furnishers fitly dub them. They need

quite as acutely a richer, more flexible, and more copious general vocabulary; and although their school-training is supposed to give them this, there is no point in which the system of public instruction more lamentably and notoriously breaks down. Nor is this altogether to be wondered at. In undertaking to give the child a command of language the school really undertakes an enterprise for which it is not fitted. Language can only be acquired by living with and in it. The child's arithmetic reflects his teacher. His speech reflects his mother. The school, in the nature of things, does not have the child long enough and cannot give to conversation a large enough proportion even of the short time it does have him. As a matter of fact, he is not allowed to talk much at school, and since it is only by incessant and copious use of words that a command of them can be acquired, he must learn at home, or not at all, whatever fluency and accuracy and comeliness of speech he is ever to attain. What is more, nobody would profit more than his mother by his capacity adequately to express himself. For she can competently deal with him only if she understands him. Fully to understand children would mean in most cases a solution of all the difficulties of their training; and one enormous help towards understanding them is the power on their part accurately to express themselves. Many times we punish or blame them, or at the least form an unjust estimate of their character, from a speech or act, which, if they were

able to explain themselves, we would see from quite a different angle. Of course, they never can wholly explain themselves, because, like the rest of us, they have little idea of why they do things. Most adult misunderstandings come from this incapacity for self-analysis. But the clear thinking, which is the first step towards self-comprehension and self-explanation, can only exist in connection with a command of a clear medium of expression. It is, therefore, perhaps not too much to say that of all the services which we try to render to the children under our charge none should take higher rank or call out more fully our most ardent and ingenious efforts than the attempt to free them, as soon as possible, from the prison of dumbness, from the limbo of inarticulateness.

For the ordinary mother, with no training in the teaching of English, with no time to learn new methods, who must just do the best she can with the resources at her command, there is perhaps no better expedient to adopt than to talk with the child. Indeed, this is perhaps the best expedient of all for anyone. If, without taking special thought, the mother is already doing this, she is not an ordinary mother, but a very extraordinarily intelligent one, who can give all the rest of us pointers on her profession; for most of us, if we stop to consider the way in which the days and weeks really pass in our homes, will find that we almost never take the time to talk *with* the children. We talk at them enough,

in all conscience, but we are apt, if there are no commands or suggestions to be made, to leave them to themselves and to wash our conversational hands of them. We all almost without exception not only do not talk with the children, but we have an almost irresistible impulse to cut them short when they try to talk with us. The phrases with which we evade conversation with them are worn threadbare with much use. "Don't interrupt, dear." "No, Mother can't talk to you now." "Don't you see I'm busy and can't listen now." "Run into the kitchen and tell Bridget about it." "Oh, do stop that incessant chatter." Or if we do not go so far as this, we adopt the other evasion of the absent ear, the wandering eye, the meaningless comments thrown in at random, "Is that so?" "Well!" "Did you?" and very often, to end up with, the confession extorted by a point-blank question, "Why, dear, to tell the truth, I haven't been paying very much attention to what you were saying. What was it all about?" If a mother lives who has not gone through this process a hundred times, I should like to meet her.

But we must all confess that this is not the best way to encourage the careful and accurate use of language. The child's long, rambling talks are not especially interesting or pointed, but his impulse to talk, even if incoherently, is the best, the only tool we have to use in the improvement of his speech. If we start with this impulse and use it wisely we can go far. Those who have not tried really to converse

reasonably and sensibly with a child about topics which naturally interest him can have no idea of how eager he is to express himself, how he welcomes interest in his remarks, and expands to fluency under sympathetic attention. Because he cares about what he is saying, he tries hard to say it so that he will be understood and heeded, and he seizes willingly on suggestions which seem to help him. The breathless and excited narration of the events of a game of hide-and-seek or of baseball or merely of an afternoon spent in "playing house" can be made, if the mother is tactful in her questionings and promptings, an exercise in coherence, in sequence, in vividness, and accuracy of phrase, the value of which no teacher of English could hope to equal. And to hear and to share in good table-talk is perhaps a greater aid in learning a language than can be obtained in any other way.

One of the hard things we unprofessional educators must learn about education is that we cannot help a child, no matter how passionately we may love him. We can only help him to help himself; and for that battle, which is to last all his life, we can put no better weapon in his hand than an instinctive command of a serviceable, adequate, and agreeable language. For, as the anthropological expert insists, this question of words is not a question of "mere words," but of the essential elements of civilization, clothed and influenced by words.

## MORAL THERMOMETERS

The child who can rouse in us anger or impatience or excitement feels himself stronger than we; and a child respects strength only.—*Amiel's Journal.*

It is my conviction that few of us appreciate the value of thermometers in promoting harmony in the home. There are even people with a prejudice against thermometers. Everybody knows the person who cries out impatiently: "Oh, why look at the thermometer! Do you need quicksilver in a tube to tell whether you are cold?"

The sufficient answer is: "Well, I know how I *feel*, but I don't know how I *am*. Before I try to make conditions suit my present feeling, I'd better find out if it wouldn't be more reasonable to make my feelings suit the present conditions." When I have been sitting still, sewing or writing, and find my feet icy and the cold chills running up my back, it might be easy to conclude that the room is cold, that someone is neglecting the stove or furnace, and that I have every right to make an aggrieved demand for more fire. But if I first consult the impartial little graduated tube and find that it registers seventy-two, there is but one thing for me to do, to get up and take some brisk exercise to stir my blood.

On the other hand, when I come in, glowing from

a fine walk in frosty air, the nursery may seem more than warm enough for the baby's bath, and only a consultation of the thermometer keeps me from exposing the poor infant to a temperature little short of arctic. And ah! the mutual recriminations when the person who is glowing from a walk gets into a discussion with the person who has been sitting sewing for a couple of hours. The matter simply must be referred to the little umpire on the wall.

What a blessing it would be if someone could invent a thermometer to set a truthful, unvarying standard of ethics! What confusion it would clarify! What acrimonious discussions it would avert! It would prevent mistakes (especially in the treatment of children) fully as disastrous as bathing the baby in a snowdrift would be. But alas! a moral thermometer cannot be bought, like a material one of wood and glass, for twenty-five cents, nor indeed for a million dollars. It must be evolved with difficulty out of human intelligence and conscience.

Yet in the upbringing of children there is nothing which we need more than some method, surer than the passing sensation of the moment, for determining what is the real significance of any given act. If the state of our physical feeling can make us imagine that a cold room is warm and a warm room cold, how much more easily can the state of our nerves make us imagine a bad action a good one, and think that a good one is bad. On a Sunday morning, in the good

half-hour of relaxation after a leisurely breakfast, nothing is more entertaining than to watch indulgently the noisy romps of the children "playing bear" with the rug, and imperiling every breakable object in the room. On Monday evening, after a hard day's work, in which everything has gone wrong, the very same children playing the very same game with the same degree of noise and potential destruction are told impatiently: "Do be quiet! Don't be so naughty!" Now a moral thermometer would register that act of the children not as "naughty," but as the result of bad judgment. This rough game, suited for the barn or attic, did not become a wise one to play in a living-room merely because the parents felt good-natured on Sunday morning; neither on Monday evening does adult fatigue and irritation turn the children's failure to use good judgment into a willful crime.

But most children must learn to survive as best they can the wildly varying extremes of an ethical temperature that is determined, not by things as they are, but by things as they happen to affect their elders. They must learn to emulate the patient philosophy of the little boy who, upon being asked what wicked thing he had done that his mother should scold him so, explained briefly: "Oh, Mamma's got a nawful headache to-day." Under such a system what ideas of right and wrong will the children themselves learn? Will they not have the conception that a good action is something done when one's mother

is feeling well and good-natured; a bad one, anything done when she has a headache?

Worst of all is the jangling when parents' nerves do not happen to agree with each other; when, for instance, the mother is feeling well and the father has a headache, or *vice versa*. One person is in the mood to accept childish noise as a cheerful evidence of health and good spirits; the other flinches with a really physical sensitiveness from strident voices and toppling chairs. Then, not only are the unfortunate children judged according to an impermanent standard, but there is not even for the moment an agreement of authority as to what the standard shall be. What common ground can there be between two people in such totally contrasted moods? How can they ever agree about the amount and kind of suggestion, guidance, or reprimand to give the children? "How can they agree?" How can any human action be made more just, more equitable, if not by casting away one's petty personal "feelings" and referring oneself to eternal immutable standards?

Those standards, being august and mighty, are not to be consulted casually or carelessly. There are few rules-of-thumb to be extracted from a consideration of the eternal verities. One cannot refer to them as one does to a recipe in a cookbook, expecting that without thought on one's own part every detail will be settled, every proposition decided. Nobody, except one's own self, can set up standards of right treatment for one's children, because nobody has

ever had just such children before; and to set up standards of right treatment is an arduous undertaking. Moral thermometers can be adjusted to register accurately only by a vigorous effort of the whole personality; mind, heart, imagination, and insight. Even this is not enough. The conditions must be right for the mind, heart, and insight to work smoothly with no loss of power from distractions or passion.

Moreover, the constructing of a moral thermometer for registering the moral quality of childish acts needs the very best thought of father and mother combined. And right there is the first big difficulty which is apt to remain unsolved, a constantly present grain of sand in the eye, which prevents clear vision and leads to incessant, ever-repeated irritation. The father and the mother of a family, no matter how dear to each other, are two human beings, not one, and there is bound to be some difference of opinion between them about moral values. This very difficulty is one more immensely important reason for trying to decide so fundamental a question by the lucid, unhurried exercise of the reason. For if it is left to the haphazard chance of the moment of pressing necessity, every outward circumstance exerts a baleful pressure towards injustice and irritation, or at least towards a snap-judgment based on hasty, superficial thought. Every father and mother ought to go through many earnest heart-searchings as to what they seriously think to be bad actions in a child

of any given age, and what they consider good ones. Their difference of estimate about these great questions should be harmonized in quiet, unhurried discussions when nothing for the moment is at stake; not heatedly thrashed out in the presence of the child at the exasperating moment when the china is broken or the clean dress mud-spattered.

And it is a great pity to "harmonize" differences of opinion by eliminating the judgment and thought of one or the other parent. American households are apt to "simplify" the problem by practically cutting out the father. It is a common saying that to the mother belongs all the moral training of the children. The father, we hear, is not with the children so much, has not had so much experience, does not give so much thought to them, does not take the care of them that the mother does, and hence should not undertake to decide questions relating to them. A good many modern American women are beginning to react with some violence from this unfortunate tradition and to see that an invaluable factor in the life of the children is taken away if we for any reason practically exclude their father. In the first place, if he is with the children so little as to be really unable to judge correctly the episodes of their lives, something is terribly wrong with the organization of the family, so wrong that it ought to be righted if the united efforts of all concerned can right it. As a character in a recent novel says: "First of all, the children need bread-and-butter—

yes, that is true, but after that they need bread-and-butter and father a great deal more than bread-and-butter and sugar." It is important that the father shall have opinions (and the data on which to form them soundly) about the moral problems of the children, not for his sake, but for theirs. The very fact that he is not with the children so constantly, that he comes and goes into a bigger world of adult decisions, is apt to mean that his instinctive sense of proportion remains truer than the mother's. She must be a remarkable woman indeed who does not occasionally feel her reason almost unhinged by the press of minute, personal details in life with children. In the construction and application of a moral thermometer, the father's is not infrequently the eye which sees that the nightgown carelessly left in the middle of the floor does not deserve such extremity of reprobation as the commission of a willful unkindness, and that dirty hands and a lying tongue are really not in the same category of misdeeds. It is he who, viewing the family life occasionally from a distance, is apt to see it in that truer perspective, which is just as necessary to a right adjusting of the scale of judgment as the mother's copious and intimate knowledge of details or temperament.

Let us suppose, then, even if the picture is a little fancifully overdrawn, the father and mother, sitting together in a quiet hour, taking stock of their opinions and convictions, and setting themselves soberly

to the task of constructing a moral thermometer, to which they may refer in moments of stress or perplexity. Of course everybody's standard for details must be individual and above all must vary with the child treated. Yet I think that all fathers and mothers taking thought on the subject would agree as to some essentials, could unite on the broad, general divisions of their scale of moral values.

I think everyone would agree that all childish actions can be divided broadly into three classes; at one end of the scale those actions consciously directed to a wrong end (not very numerous in a normal child's life), at the other extreme those consciously directed to a good end (these also not very frequent in a healthy child's life), and in between a vast multitude of miscellaneous deeds which have no really moral color one way or the other, because in doing them the child has no very definite or conscious purpose. Since these constitute the bulk of the incidents in child-life the mother is forced to handle them and to consider them infinitely more than those at either extreme of the scale, and it is not surprising that they occupy too large a space in her judgments and estimates so that she is apt to apply to them punishments and praise really due only to quite other actions. It has been pointed out how easy it is to fall into the habit of reprobating dirty hands with such vigor and emphasis that there are no expedients left to express one's disapproval of a deceitful tongue, and the child naturally concludes that they are crimes

involving equal degrees of turpitude. In the same way one's constant efforts to induce the child to adopt the conventions of polite society (or as we more often despairingly put it, "to make his manners somewhere near decent") can very easily be so eager and insistent that the child gets the notion that to remember to pull his cap from his head when he meets a lady is as important and praiseworthy an action as to protect a younger child from danger.

Suppose the consulting parents begin with the lowest of the three kinds of actions—those positively bad—the ones below zero, so to speak. Lowest in the scale, I think, everyone would agree to put any form of cruelty. No matter how busy you are or how inconvenient the occasion, a child who is showing cruelty ought to have instant and thoughtful attention. Since cruelty usually comes from lack of understanding, it may be necessary only to explain to him that he is being cruel; or at the other extreme it may be necessary to restrain him by force. Whatever is necessary should be done promptly and energetically. Nowadays cruelty is so much reprobated by all decent people that its crudest forms are seldom seen even in almost untrained individuals. For instance, the great uplifting campaign for kindness to animals has purified our national moral atmosphere so effectively that hardly anyone of the present generation would dare seriously to maltreat an animal. The traditional naughty child who pulls the wings off flies or torments the cat is not so noticeable as he was

(or is said to have been), but when a vice is made disreputable by a reform of public opinion, it has a way of taking refuge in odd nooks and corners of the human heart, where it is detected only by a keen eye and dislodged only by a vigorous effort. Big boys may no longer actually bully and torture smaller ones as they used to, but there is a certain hateful form of amusement known as "teasing," which still abounds wherever children are gathered together and which their immature imaginations are often not subtle enough to recognize as a genuine form of cruelty. Girls who would not dream of entertaining themselves by pulling a little child's hair till he cried may be observed "teasing" a smaller child to tears by hiding her doll or demolishing her house of blocks. Big boys who would scorn physically to bully little boys take unabashed delight in reducing them to hysteria by frightening them. But it is out of the question to give definite instances of this relic of the Stone Age among our children. "Teasing" is so damnably Protean in its manifestation, children given to this fault are so ingeniously inventive, that it is impossible to give a general definition of it. Unfortunately none is needed to make the term understood by those who have charge of children. The form taken by it usually depends upon the especial weak point of the younger child. This is soon discovered by the older one, and the "teasing" done is directed always upon the weak spot, whether fear, sensitive feelings, too lively imagination, or what

not. It starts up on any pretext or on none, and is one of the hardest of childish vices to control by direct command, because, taking advantage of psychology as it does, the actual action involved is frequently not reprehensible in the least, only very distressing to the weaker of the two children. The older child alleges truthfully that it is because the younger is "so foolish" that he is pained, that "nobody's hurting him." Again, it is not necessary to repeat the slippery Litany of the child, who is worming his way out of reprimands for teasing another. We are all only too familiar with it. There is, however, a sure test in detecting teasing, a test which can be explained even to a young child, if he has the matter set forth to him in a quiet moment. Any form of "fun," even though it may not come under any set prohibition or rule, is bad, is thoroughly reprehensible, if it is consciously directed towards causing pain to another. There is no rule in any family against holding the pages of a book partly shut, but an older child who tells a younger that there are beautiful pictures in a book and then works the younger child to frenzy by so holding it that it is just impossible to open it, is "hurting" him as effectively as though he were sticking pins into his arms, and is deriving his amusement from the other's distress and from nothing else.

In this as in other phases of child-life direct commands given at the moment, in spite of our unimaginative dependence upon them, are of little avail in

turesque fabrications of their imagination. This is a troublesome defect of character, which needs wise attention and guiding, but it has really nothing in common with genuine lying, which is intended to get the child out of deserved trouble, or to get something which otherwise would not be allowed him.

Even this form of untruth, heart-sick though it makes a parent, does not always deserve the place at the very bottom of the moral thermometer which fathers and mothers are apt to give it. As the child sees it, his position, in utter dependence on the pleasure of another, entirely at the mercy of the decision of those stronger than he, without any recourse in the world against the judgment of his parents, occasionally fairly forces him into lying as a means of self-preservation. And it is true that our well-meant, anxious efforts to induce him to tell the truth often make it almost impossibly hard for him, especially if he chances to belong to the sensitive, imaginative, shrinking variety of human being. When we know a child has a tendency slightly to warp the truth, it often seems to be our perverse practice continually to put him in situations where exactitude of statement would be hard for anybody; we surround truth-telling with every possible disagreeable penalty, so that it is inevitably connected in his mind with disaster to himself. Suppose that, a Gulliver in Brobdingnag, you had yielded to temptation and abstracted one from a plateful of crisp sugary cookies. Would you not have a considerable

struggle to narrate this small matter just as it happened if a giant with a club in his hand and a frown on his face approached you threateningly and said with an ominous accent: "Don't you know you're forbidden to take things without permission? Did you take one of those cookies or didn't you? Speak up, now!" Would you not be more likely to give a veracious account if he remarked casually: "Why, I thought I put six cookies on that plate, and now there are only five. Did they look so good you had to take one? They *are* good, aren't they?"

It is a pity, of course, to condone a fault like taking food without permission, but that is really less important than that the child acquire the habit of telling the truth, which is the foundation of every relation he will ever have in his life. Most people with any capacity for imaginative divination of character allow that overmastering temptation is a partial excuse for pretty bad actions even in adults. It is well, in trying to rate any given falsehood by one's moral thermometer, to take circumstances into account, to put oneself in the child's place, and to know whether or not the temptation to save himself by untruth has been exceedingly great. Here again, as so often, the healthful expedient is to call the child's attention, not to error, but to truth; not so much to watch him with an anxiously suspicious eye for slight slips from accuracy as to commend and to notice any correct statements, to multiply occasions when the natural thing is for him to give a literally

truthful account of happenings (unimportant in themselves), and above all to surround him in the home with an atmosphere of crystal clearness of veracity.

Selfishness is a fault which is hard to rate properly on one's moral thermometer, because children are so very much like adults that selfishness is apt to permeate to some degree most of their actions. I am inclined to think that its place in the scale should vary according to the deliberateness of the intention. Nearly every child is prone to yield to a sudden temptation to grab what he wants very much, even if this means taking it away from someone else; and though this ought to be checked and counteracted as much as possible, it is really almost an unconscious reflex action of a primitive personality, and need not be condemned as severely as a coldly calculating piece of egotism or self-seeking, which certainly deserves a very low place on the register.

I suppose that most people would insert cowardice about at this point in the scale; but psychologists tell us that this is a weakness rather than a fault, and we all know that the normal child almost always outgrows it unless he is discouraged by too many depressing references to it by his elders. It ought to be made a crime punishable by law to "twit" a child with being afraid of anything or to try to force him quickly by external force into conquering his fear. Our own impatience with a child who is timid can usually be traced, not to a genuine fear for the

manliness of his after-life, but to our own vanity. If our neighbor's phlegmatic, somewhat obtuse little girl advances boldly into the surf, we are touched on a sore place to have our own sensitive, highly-strung, imaginative little boy shrink back. It reflects somehow on us—we are in that position, so harrowing to unregenerate human nature, of envying others instead of exciting envy in them, and our lack of patience with the boy has little enough to do with the far-sighted affection for him which we claim as the basis of our rigorous treatment of his cowardice.

Somewhere near actual selfishness comes its near relative, the lack of consideration for others, and here we have a vice which is of constant occurrence in childish life. We might as well resign ourselves to most of it and wait till consideration grows with growing experience. Few but exceptionally thoughtful children seem to be able to remember the rights of others until actual experience has given them the material for the exercise of their imagination. For instance, it is almost impossible for a normal boy to avoid noise, even though this is extremely painful to quiet-loving elders. Noise never gives him a headache. He glories in it. How should he remember, even though he has been told repeatedly, the strange aversion of grown-ups for policeman's rattles and drums and trumpets.

We are climbing up the scale of our moral thermometer towards a neutral center where there are qualities which are really neither ethically good nor

bad, but only convenient or the reverse, desirable or undesirable. Carelessness, that childish characteristic which is the bane of precise elders, has often such uncomfortable results in the household that it is punished as though it were a willful fault, and not a failing, against which the child should be fortified by well-chosen exercises and by a sound routine of life. If my little boy stumbles and breaks the glass he is carrying, instead of snapping at him I ought to resolve to direct his physical activities so as to develop steadiness of foot and eye. We are all also too much given to judging carelessness by its results rather than by its intentions. If a child smashes a vase by tossing his ball in the parlor, I ought to reflect that to toss a ball indoors was just as injudicious a proceeding before he broke the vase as afterwards. If I allowed him without protest to do it in the first place, I am unjust in giving way to angry reproaches only when mischief has been done. In this neutral zone of the "desirable" or "undesirable" I should rank good or bad "manners" so far as they are purely formal and not based on real consideration for the comfort of others.

Now, though omitting innumerable divisions, we have sketchily worked our way up to the pleasant realm of virtues. What real virtues can a child have? I think they may be summed up in the varying degree to which he successfully enters upon the battle against his own egotism. But the ways in which he may chance to manifest his first impulses to conquer

self are sometimes very queer, and sometimes so unconventional as to be far from a pleasure to grown-ups. Suppose your little boy has had at Sunday school a lesson on the beauty and holiness of charity. On the way home he puts his lesson into practice by giving his best new overcoat to a poor child, alleging (what is perfectly true) that he has an older coat at home and the other child has none. What would you feel like saying to him? Would your comment on his action be one that would sow the seeds of religious skepticism in his heart? Or would you look at your moral thermometer, see that its mercury stood very high, and summon the consistency to abstain from blaming him for his impulsive deed?

Having constructed the first rough draft of our moral thermometer, let us test it and ourselves on a few average cases. It is a hot summer evening, supper is over, and everybody is sitting about in cheerful, ungirdled comfort. Down on the lawn the children's pet cat has unearthed a fat toad, around which she is excitedly prancing, striking at the clumsy creature, starting back in nervous tremors over the sudden leaps, and generally making a ridiculous spectacle of herself. The children are in gales of laughter over the antics of their pet, a laughter that is echoed by their elders. In that scene of easy-going amusement it will take some courage to consult a moral thermometer, see where in the scale cruelty stands, and stop the fun because it can't, after all, be very much fun for the frightened toad. But un-

less that is done, have we much right the next day to be worried because the children pull the wings off flies to laugh at *their* funny antics?

Take another instance, showing another side of the shield. After a day of nerve-racking preparations for "company," the house is in readiness, the tea-table is prettily decorated, and the finishing touches put to everything. The fatigued, slightly excited young hostess runs upstairs to dress, first her little girl, then herself. Then she hastily descends to cast a last glance around. Merciful heavens! What is all that dusty litter on the immaculate tablecloth? Broken weed-leaves and crushed flower-heads with no stems! And *what* is little Molly saying over and over in her high, shrill child's voice? "See how I helped you, Mother! See how I helped you make the table pretty!"

Lucky Molly, if, after her distracted mother looks down into the flushed face of honest pride, she sees hanging beside it a moral thermometer that records clearly the fact that there is no more virtuous impulse possible for a child than the impulse to help.

Ah, there are none of us with nerves so steady and a sense of values so instinctively just that we can count on them in the innumerable small crises of our relations with children. If we are to act fairly, consistently, and with enlightenment, we must steady ourselves by mental reference to a constant and immutable standard. And we can make that standard ours only by taking thought about the eternal verities.

# ANSWERING THE CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS

The love of study is in us the only eternal passion.—MONTESQUIEU.

SOME day a young woman with a fresh eye for the opportunities of the life about her will open an office, hang out a shingle marked, "Professional Question-Answerer to Children," and she will make her fortune. What's more, she will earn it. But, though she will have to work hard, she need fear no rival in her profession, for unless other young women follow her lead into prosperity, she will find no one else making even a pretense of answering the children's questions. Everybody is too much occupied with other affairs; fathers are too busy earning a living; mothers are too busy housekeeping; teachers are too busy teaching. Every one of these busy persons feels the panic impulse to turn tail and flee before the relentless and copious catechisings of childhood. The children are quite used to shouting their interrogations after rapidly retreating backs. In the majority of cases the only honest answer to the question, "Who answers the children's questions in your family?" is, "Well, whoever gets caught with them and can't run fast enough to escape."

There is, every mother knows, considerable excuse

for this attitude on the part of grown-ups. In the child's voracious appetite for information there is something almost terrifying to the dulled adult acquiescence in ignorance. If " terrifying " seems too fantastically exaggerated a word, nobody who has ever experienced a long séance of question-answering will deny that it is thoroughly exhausting. We lay this mental fatigue on our part to a variety of causes, for all of which we hold the children to blame. We say it is excessively hard to explain matters so that childish minds can understand; we claim that their curiosity extends to subjects which are not suitable for their age; we say that their attention is fitful, that they do not wait for the answers to the questions they propound. But the real reason why we object to their incessant questionings is simply that we *don't know the answers.* To minister properly to the mental hunger of our children, there is need of a professional question-answerer to come once a day, like a visiting district nurse.

A child asks, with a perfectly natural curiosity, why the sunlight comes in through the window, but not through the wall of the house, and we find it hard to answer him, because when it comes right down to the heart of the matter we don't *know* why. And, moreover, we are so used to our ignorance in this and a thousand other subjects that there is something disconcerting, almost shocking, in having our mental apathy stirred by a call to action. No one doubts for a moment that a wise, broad-minded professor

of physics, who thoroughly understood his subject, could explain why glass is transparent, so that even a child could understand him. In all likelihood his explanation would be a never-forgotten intellectual epoch to the child. The man with a trained and philosophic grasp on the phenomena of matter would have seized on that query as the opportunity for the child to acquire the beginnings of his acquaintance with the world of molecules. What the child would have acquired from his mother (if she is like the average mother) would have been an added familiarity with a formula, which runs something like this: "Why can you see through glass? What a question! That's the nature of glass!"

Now, it is evidently expecting too much of the average mother (or indeed of any mother at all) to ask that she have as profound and philosophic an acquaintance with the various branches of human knowledge as university professors. But, at least for older children, any mother can go with her boys and girls to the sources of information. In these days of cheap books and innumerable public libraries there are few families who have not access to good books of reference in one form or another. The only difficulty is to acquire the habit of using them as constantly, thoroughly, and intelligently as they should be used. It is a habit that is not only an invaluable habit for children to acquire, but an easy one, if prompt advantage is taken of every natural impulse of curiosity on their part; if every question is re-

garded as a precious stimulus, rather than a nuisance.

Take the simplest expedient first. It is astonishing how many questions can be answered, how much information acquired, and how alertness of mind can be fostered by the use of a fairly large dictionary. And yet the average family either does not own a good dictionary, or consults it only at rare intervals, to ascertain the spelling of a difficult word. A child hears the main highway spoken of by an elderly person as the "turnpike." "Why is it called the 'turnpike,' Aunt Sarah?" Aunt Sarah doesn't know, she's sure—never thought of it before—it just *is* the turnpike. Mother doesn't know either, but, quickly turning to good account the stirrings of intellectual curiosity of the child, reaches for the dictionary and with the child looks up the word. The result is not only an interesting bit of information acquired, but the historical sense of the little brain has been improved, and (most important of all) the habit of persistence in the search for knowledge has been strengthened and encouraged. Now notice by what simple means this was accomplished. Almost anybody's pocketbook can manage a dictionary, and if not, there is a big one in the nearest library. Almost anybody, even the busiest mother, can find a few minutes in the course of the day to consult it.

Of course, an encyclopedia is a bigger storehouse of knowledge than a dictionary, and, though it costs more, it seems to me that a good encyclopedia is al-

most as necessary an article of furniture as a dining-room table in a home where children are being brought up. Indeed, it *is* a sort of dining-room table, on which is spread a bounteous feast, open to all who will give themselves the trouble to sit down and partake. Certainly an encyclopedia of some sort is more necessary for growing children than rugs on the floors or curtains at the windows.

But there is only one variety of encyclopedia that will do. I do not mean a handsomely bound one or a set in twenty volumes—I mean a *used* set! Except in its first newness, a clean, fresh-looking book of reference is a shame to any family. A thumbed, dog's-eared encyclopedia that opens with a meek limpness and lies flat open at any page with broken-back submission is a certificate of honor to any parent.

What Danton cried out more than a century ago, "After bread the first need of the people is education," is as true to-day as then, and we modern Americans are mistaken if we think that our children's "education" is completely or even very largely cared for by their attendance at school. We parents have such an advantage over the teachers! Their hard task at school is to force the children to learn what school-superintendents, principals, and educational experts in general have decided in solemn conclave that children must learn. The fascinatingly easy task of the parent or whoever assumes the rôle of "professional question-answerer" is to teach

the children what they ardently desire to learn, what their vividly active little minds naturally seek. And since the "professional question-answerer" is usually the mother, let her take heed lest she lose the splendid strategic position which is hers by virtue of her close, intimate, and continuous association with the child.

The teacher has the child for a few hours in the morning and a few in the afternoon, and during most of that short time she is tragically hampered by the fact that the child is not allowed to talk freely and ask questions about the subjects which interest him. The mother has the child all the rest of his waking hours. If she will, she can treat every question as so much valuable seed; she can plant it in good ground and by cultivation aid it to bring forth such rich fruits as a well-informed mind, an alert mentality, and a life-long insurance against boredom. The teacher at exactly half-past ten every morning, rain or shine, no matter what is the state of the child's mind, must try to force some knowledge of geography into his brain. The mother by the mere physical fact of being constantly in the same house with the child is aware of the moment when his brain is awake on the subject of geography and craves information about it.

Suppose her in the kitchen putting away some groceries, which the delivery boy has just dumped down on the table. It may not occur to her as a specially geographic moment, but to the child by

her side fingering over the packages and eying the labels with a child's fresh interest, the material suggests world-wanderings. What is he doing but asking for a lesson in geography when he asks: "Say, Mother, what is tapioca, anyhow?" or "What funny things dates are, and what awfully tall trees they grow on, if they're like the pictures. I don't see how they ever get the dates off." The fact that the average mother doesn't *know* what tapioca is anyhow, or how in the world they get dates off the trees, ought to make it more interesting for her to go hand in hand with the child to the source of information.

Of course, it is often impossible for her to do this literally at the instant the child calls attention to the need. She feels, not unreasonably, that she cannot stop putting away the groceries to go and find out how cocoa is manufactured. But she can have in the kitchen, in the dining-room, in every room in the house, a pad of paper and a pencil, on which to note down such questions, and after supper either she or father can take them up. One can imagine a "question-answering" father sitting down before the book-shelves and reaching for the dictionary as he asks cheerfully: "Well, what is the grist of questions for to-day?" One can imagine a question-answering mother being proud of the length of the list of intelligent questions asked by the children instead of quailing before them.

Of course, as the child grows and has constantly before him the example of considering questions

seriously, he will not wait for his mother's leisure moments or his father's return before slaking his thirst for information. Instead of letting his intellectual curiosity evaporate, as we are all too apt to do, in idle wonderings and "guesses," he will instinctively turn to some reliable source of information and drink deep. Then let his parents beware lest he very soon has a better education than they!

Though books are precious mines of information, they are not the only, or even the best, educational material available for the question-answerer at home. There is much talk nowadays about "nature-study" and the value of going straight with the child to original sources for such study. This is all true. The excellence of studying trees, flowers, and insects at first hand can scarcely be exaggerated. But it has been so long and so insistently brought to our attention that everyone is aware of its necessity and feasibility. What we do not realize is that many other objects as diverse as anatomy and physics, mechanics and chemistry, may be studied in the average home by the simple expedient of honestly answering the questions which naturally rise in the mind of an ordinarily bright child.

A working knowledge of the essential elements of anatomy may be better obtained through repeated observations (intelligently directed) of the dressing of the chicken for the family's Sunday dinner than from long poring over colored charts and physiology books. And a child is beginning of its own

accord the study of physics when he asks, as he turns on the hot-water faucet: "What makes the hot water leave the boiler in the kitchen and climb up the pipe here to the bathroom? I thought water always ran downhill." More than a reference to an encyclopedia is needed to answer that question. He needs, in the first place, a plain exposition (it can be done by a bit of rubber tubing and two water-glasses) of the invincible zeal of water to mount to a point as high as its source. Not only he, but his mother as well, will find a visit to a house in process of construction a fascinating revelation of what lies under the floors and behind the walls of his own home. There are few plumbers who, approached tactfully, will not allow a mother and a group of children to examine his work, just as there are few blacksmiths or carpenters or glaziers or painters who would not be flattered to have their work made the subject of admiring attention.

The principle of question-answering as a means of education applies to nearly all the elements of everyday life. Instead of breathing a sigh of relief when a child's question can be stifled and silenced by the blanket-answer, "Oh, that's the nature of it," his mother ought to regard each query as another thread in the clew which, held firmly in his little hand, will lead him through the labyrinth of indifference and mental sloth to conquer and slay the monster Ignorance.

Does the child say, looking at the trimming on his

mother's dress: "I wonder how they get the stripes into cloth!" or "However *can* they make velvet?" If his mother is quick-witted she sees another clew. Perhaps she buys a little handloom (such as can be purchased for a small sum in any shop dealing in kindergarten wares). Perhaps, if she lives in the country, she takes the child to visit an old-fashioned loom and a weaver of rag carpet. Perhaps, if she is a city-dweller, she makes a trip to a cotton or woolen mill.

Another clew is indicated by the child who, wandering about the kitchen, remarks: "How different corn-meal and flour are! What makes one so coarse and the other so fine?" The alert mother begins investigations as to the whereabouts of the nearest milling establishment. Or if he says, thumbing over his book, "What makes printing, anyway?" better than any verbal explanation is a visit to a printing-press.

There are several delightful by-products to this system of question-answering. One is that the average mother will find it almost as satisfactory as the child to gain a knowledge of the genesis of many of the articles she so commonly uses and about which she is so ignorant. Another is the growth on the child's part of a disposition to use his holidays and leisure time in a rational way, which will give him lasting satisfaction, instead of always turning instinctively to the idle, exciting, and profitless frequenting of so-called places of amusement. Still

another is the habit of steady and purposeful observation, which is insensibly acquired by attention given at once to any chance phenomenon.

But perhaps the most important result when the mother voluntarily assumes the rôle of professional question-answerer is the intimacy with her children which is engendered by the habit. If, hand in hand with them, she has sought out the reason why milkweed seeds have down on them and why a three-legged stool will stand firmly on uneven ground, it is most likely that when the moment comes for an inquiry into the darker mysteries and disappointments of life, she may have the poignant satisfaction of feeling her child's hand reach out instinctively and grasp hers in the hour of trial. And no greater reward than this can crown the efforts of a mother's life.

## A FAIR DIVISION OF THE HOME

In the average American home there are many material conditions which make the providing of a right background for children's lives a perplexing undertaking. The home is for everybody in the family, not alone for the children. It would not only be intolerably uncomfortable for adults if everything were arranged to suit the children's needs, it would also be very bad for the children. Eliminate as conscientiously as we will all unnecessary factors of adult irritability, of conventionality, of mental inertia, of lack of insight, there remains a large body of stubborn facts which refuse to be eliminated without at the same time carrying with them the very life of the institution of the family. A family is a collection of human beings of varying ages and tastes and needs, which must be tactfully adjusted, even when all the members are relatively speaking of the same age. When the family is composed of children and adults the conflict of tastes, needs, and interests becomes acute. There is no getting around the fact that a rational, healthy life for children and a similar life for adults have very many points of utter dissimilarity.

Much that is both legitimate and desirable in adult-life is really and genuinely incompatible with much

that is both legitimate and desirable in child-life. However much we may love the children, no one can deny this. It is true even when there is no fault to be found on either side. It is not a naughty act, quite the contrary, for a healthy boy to whistle or sing out of high spirits; but it is justly regarded as an unmitigated nuisance if done in the room where Mother is trying to entertain some friends. Running and jumping are splendid exercises for the young, but scarcely agreeable accompaniments to a meeting of Father's club. Great unhappiness and friction are caused to everyone if either side is required entirely to give up his own way of life to suit the other. It is as if an opera singer and a mathematician were shut up together in one small room. The one must have opportunity to sing and the other needs quiet and long silences. Two very estimable people would make each other mutually miserable through no willful fault of either. This is not, to put it mildly, in the least a new problem. It is as old as time and as wide-spread as the human race, and it has been solved in many different ways. At one extreme is the traditional English method, nowadays somewhat modified but still differing fundamentally from our own system. The typical English idea is that "children should be kept in the nursery, where they belong." A nurse to devote herself to the care of the children is a necessity, to obtain which English people of the least claim to gentility will pinch themselves in every way. The children

eat with her, play with her, go out with her, are bathed, dressed, and undressed by her, and waking in the night call upon "Nursie" to quiet their fears or attend to their wants instead of upon "Mother." When the boys are old enough (from an English standpoint) to leave home, say at ten years of age, they are sent away to boarding-school, and the girls are turned over from Nursie to a governess.

Now, while I agree with the average American mother that nothing would induce me thus to bring up my children, it must be admitted that there are many advantages connected with the English system. English children are apt to be rosier, quieter, less nervous and irritable than ours, their digestion is better, and (as we are told to repletion) their manners are quiet and retiring, quite unlike the loudly self-assertive monopoly of the center of the stage supposed to be characteristic of the American child. This must be granted. But there are several other obvious and quite different results. It seems very odd to us, for instance, that Stevenson's "Child's Garden of Verses" should be dedicated, not to his mother, but to his nurse, and that in many other ways English men of letters testify as heartily as Stevenson that the priceless treasure of a child's first affection goes (as is natural) to the woman who devotes her life to care for him—except when they testify bitterly to the dreariness of the child left only to a nursie, who is not a natural mother and

who has only a hireling's perfunctory interest in him.

Furthermore, English literature is so full of pictures of the tragic remoteness and oftentimes animosity between father and son, and mother and daughter, that American readers (perhaps overestimating the importance of this testimony) feel like asking if there are no English parents who are intimate friends and boon companions of their girls and boys? It seems possible (if one must choose) that even our much-depreciated self-assertiveness is a happier attitude for children to have towards their elders than the pretty, shy, "good manners," which apparently so often cover a complete alienation from all family feeling.

Yet it is a pity to be obliged to choose between two such evils. With characteristic American self-confidence, one feels that somehow we ought to be clever enough to devise some other more desirable alternative.

One indisputable fact is that as the average American household is organized it is almost impossible to keep the children out of evidence. There is no nurse, there is no nursery; the children swarm all over the house because they have no other place to swarm. Even if we wished to, it would be a very troublesome matter to keep them out of adult life. But if we think it necessary, we do many other things which are troublesome. It is most upsetting and troublesome to go into quarantine for measles, and yet one

does it. If one really could be convinced that it were for the best interests of the children to "quarantine" them, so to speak, thousands of conscientious American parents would put themselves to any inconvenience to accomplish that feat.

Here we have come to the only consideration worth a moment's thought. *Is* it for the best interests of the children? From this standpoint there are many reasons why children should neither be allowed nor forced to share constantly the adult-life and pursuits about them. An immense amount of the usual friction between elders and children, on which is based much of the usual "discipline," spankings, scoldings, dark closets, and the like, comes from the physical inability of two locomotives of different gauges to occupy the same track. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that 90 per cent. of the usual "naughtiness" in childhood will upon impartial analysis prove to mean "inconvenience to elders." And yet adults, even down-trodden American adults, have a right to somewhat convenient lives.

This is one side of the matter. On the other stands a consideration which, however one looks at it, outweighs everything else. If the child does not share the parents' life, and if the parents do not share the child's life, day by day, in small as well as great matters, in early childhood as in adolescence, both will have irrevocably missed the highest, sweetest, most valuable part of the filial relation—a real intimacy between parent and child, a really deep

knowledge of the character of each by the other. Only the perfect intimacy of happily married man and woman can equal this other gift of the gods as a bulwark against the sorrows and burdens of life.

In addition to this vital reason for having children live much with their parents, there are several others of almost as great importance. In no other way can they absorb and assimilate so thoroughly and instinctively good standards of manners and morals. No amount of verbal exhortation to politeness will make the impression on a child's mind that is made by constant association with courteous and gentle-minded elders. Years of Sunday-school teaching may (and often do) lie on the child's mind like oil on water with no mixing as a result of the contact; but no child can be impervious to years of intimate association with adult lives founded on uprightness, self-abnegation, and honesty. Most educators doubt the value of conscious instruction in moral values for the child. His ultimate morality depends, they believe, entirely upon what he unconsciously assimilates from the usual conduct of those about him. Even in the less fundamental but equally important realm of purely intellectual life there can be no doubt that constant contact with well-stored adult minds is more informing for the normal child than any schooling.

Let us now recapitulate and draw up in battle array the reasons for and against the presence of children in the ordinary daily life of their parents.

Against it are the facts that the interests and desires of children and of adults are often unavoidably at odds; that children's nerves need and can endure less stimulation than those of adults; that there are adult conversations and activities, perfectly right and legitimate, into which children would better not enter. To offset these considerations we have found that in no other way than by daily and hourly life-in-common can intimate acquaintanceship and hence deep-founded affection exist between parent and child; that in no other way can permanent standards of right and wrong be established in the child's conscience; that in no other way can so valuable a stock of general information be absorbed by the child's mind. A formidable array of antagonistic facts which it would seem almost hopeless to try to reconcile!

But there is a general under whose practical leadership we often see marching in amicable rank and file facts even more discordant. He is variously named, but he is best known as "Ordinary Horse Sense." If he is given full command we shall see him swing our opposite facts into line together and start them off in a stirring quickstep towards their common goal—the best interests of the child.

In other words, ideal child-life, like ideal adult-life, should be arranged as flexibly as possible, with a large amount of "play," as it is called in mechanics, and as small an amount of rigidity as is consistent with coherence and continuity. Varying

conditions should be met with varying devices. Life-in-common with their elders should be a pleasant condition very easily attained for children, rather than either an enforced necessity or an undreamed-of possibility. Children should be able to enjoy it by conforming to a few simple rules governing all reasonable social life, and should be able blamelessly to escape from it when its rigors weigh on their young souls. Adults in their turn should profit and be governed by the same conditions.

For the most part this ideal condition can be at least approximated by attention to the simple rule of physics, that two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. If either adult or child wishes to indulge in some occupation which virtually makes him occupy all the space within given boundaries, he must retire from the part of space occupied by the family, and he should be able to retire! To offset every prohibition placed on a harmless pursuit there should be an alternative possibility. If the children have a room of their own, their very own, plainly furnished and never required for show purposes, the command, "Do stop that messy whittling!" can be replaced by the remark, as of one reasoning being to another: "See here, Pete, you can whittle if you want to, but you mustn't litter up the living-room!"

The sacrifice of some part of the house as the children's very own room is not enough, although it is an essential part of this plan. There should be

some outdoor fastness of childhood also, where life that seems rational to children can be lived without interference with adult eccentricities in the way of flower-beds, lawns, and neat paths. And again, providing of an outdoor "own place" for the children is not enough. Adults should loyally apply the "alternative" rule to themselves. With any sort of other retreat possible, there is no righteousness in making the living-room hold its breath while Father reads the evening paper to himself or Mother writes a letter; and there is no justice in pained reproaches when it does not hold its breath, as Twentieth Century Young America is little given to doing. Reading and writing and other adult pursuits which require perfect quiet about them are as anti-social occupations as throwing a ball or frying onions, and are no more legitimate in a room dedicated to the general life of the family. If anyone wishes to practice on the cornet or spin tops or to read philosophy let him betake himself to a nook where he can indulge his harmless tastes without interfering with the average normal activities and desires of the family.

This method does not in the least presuppose a many-roomed mansion, but only a systematic division *and employment* of the space in the home which is usually much of it wasted in a manner which would cause heart-failure to a scientific factory manager. There is the living-room which should be the center of the home and used for living that is truly "social." Then there is the dining-room now, as a rule,

the sterile abode of the proprieties in the shape of the table and chairs and nothing else, kept (as a matter of gentility) entirely unoccupied except during the family meals. In a small house which has no library or its equivalent the dining-room might well be the retreat sacred to pursuits which need quiet, such as reading for adults or coloring pictures and stringing beads for children. What if it is *not* always neat and empty of all but dining-room objects?

There is the further retreat of the bedroom, now used only as a sleeping- and dressing-room. A writing desk in her bedroom, if it were only a deal-table with a five-cent bottle of ink and a penny penholder, would save the mother of the family from repressing the cheerful noise of the children by "shs" and "Do keep still!" as she tried to write her letters or keep her accounts.

As to the rough-and-ready sanctum for the children, the more in the nature of a shed, barn, or attic that is, the better the children will like it, and the less the mother's tendencies towards adult neatness and order will be harrowed up by the use made of it by its occupants. If there is absolutely no extra corner to give the children, give them the extra bedroom. If there is no extra bedroom, give them the room in which they sleep. The only essential is that it be plainly and strongly furnished and be intended for use, and never to be shown off.

Not the least valuable element of this division of

the home is the fact that the children can with perfect justice be held to an observance of their part of the bargain, that it can be made clear to them that they have no more right to invade the living-room with a troop of playmates and to start a game of tag there, innocent as is that amusement, than their elders have to go into the children's sanctum to try to read or to sleep off a headache. It is as bad for the children as it is disagreeable for the grown-ups to allow them to swarm all over the house, so that there is not a corner in which a peace-loving adult may apply his mind to a quiet game of solitaire. It may be—it often is—better for Mother's desk not to be in the living-room, but the spot where it is should be inviolably dedicated to quiet and silence. A fair division of the home should not in the least mean turning it over to the children any more than it means turning them out into the gutter as their only playground.

Acute readers may have noticed that so far in this consideration of how adults and children may live together peaceably a vital question has been entirely ignored. The assumption has been, without examination of the facts, that the child would profit more by close association with his own parents than by association with any other adults. So far I have taken quite grandly for granted that mothers and fathers are always reasonable, well-informed, well-balanced people, with equable nerves, animated by a single-

hearted devotion to the interests of the children, and endowed by nature with a special knowledge of what is best for them. This, of course, is what we parents think of ourselves, and it may do us good to face definitely the fact, usually tactfully concealed from us, that the world has not at all that opinion of us, and that it is coming more and more forcibly to act on quite the opposite conviction.

The school, which is the oldest form of asserting that other people are better for children than their own parents, is so familiar to us that we fail to see its significance; but nevertheless the school, with its ever-increasing paternalism and its varied interests, is taking more and more of the child away from his parents, and now, into the comparatively few hours left of a modern child's life out of school come stepping nonchalantly a number of new figures, all of the friendliest outward aspect—scout-masters, leaders of camp-fire girls, supervisors of public playgrounds, visiting trained nurses, kindergarten and Montessori teachers, etc. And what they tacitly say to us is nothing more or less than this: "See here, the child is the most valuable asset of the State! It is far too valuable to be left to the haphazard care of the incompetent, untrained, and preoccupied couple who chance to be his father and mother."

Now, if there is this wide-spread movement with this grim meaning under all its attractive front, surely there must be some truth in its main contentions. It may be that instead of searching our

brains to devise ways for the children to associate with us without too much trouble for us, we would do well to search our hearts to see if it is worth the children's while to associate with us at all.

Except for the accident of birth, why should our children turn to us? Is the life of the homes we give them worth their making an effort to share it? Is the conversation at meal times or around the lamp in the evenings or on the porch in the afternoons really better for them than the British expedient of banishment to a nurse and a nursery or to the various attendants hired by the State or municipality, which are the American substitutes for English practice?

We take what care we can that our children do not associate with "low" or "common" people, from whom they might learn profanity or vulgar slang. But when from our own talk they learn envy of those richer than we, malice towards our neighbors, and uncharitableness towards the weak and erring, are they so very much better off? Is profanity so very much worse than interest in the scandals served up in the morning papers? Does slang, even very vulgar slang, corrupt a child's mind more than hearing his mother lie about his age to the conductor of a train? Could anything be worse for a child than constant association with parents whose joys are always connected with getting ahead of other people; whose sorrows always come from having other people get ahead of them?

It would be a regenerating experience for most of

us to undertake during a day or two a disinterested survey of our lives to see what, if anything, there is in them of any possible value to our children. Imagine, for instance, that you are the clear-headed, large-hearted, experienced head of an orphan asylum, investigating possible homes for orphans. Listen to the talk which fills *your* home; look at the faces which come and go there; examine the purpose (or lack of it) which animates the efforts of the family; make your soul sensitive to the spirit which pervades the life of the home and you may have a great surprise.

It may be that you will find that if you were a conscientious superintendent of an orphan asylum you would pass by that prosperous, comfortable residence which you call Home, and send the children into the small, cheerful, loving home of the Danish emigrant around the corner or up to a rugged tonic, hard-working life on a stony farm.

Nowadays we are all joining pure-food leagues to protect our families from the insidious benzoate of soda (or whatever it is), although its deleterious effects are so doubtful that experts never agree about them; but who of us consistently bars out from the home the poison of spite and bad temper, the microbe of scandal and evil report? We are exhorted in every magazine we pick up to take heed that our children get enough oatmeal and pure milk to build bone and muscle. But who reproaches us for not providing our children steadily, day by day, with

the calming and fortifying food of an elevated view of life. We no longer let our little ones sit up late at night, because we know that physically they need much rest and quiet to balance the huge expenditure of energy used in their rapid growth. But we take no care to shield them from the fretting and wearying concern over trivial matters, which fills so much of our own lives. A child frequently sees his mother roused to indignation over the failure of a dress to fit or of a cake to rise; he sees his father rejoicing in a state of business which involves the failure of a commercial rival. How often is he aware that there is a righteous indignation over the wrongs of the oppressed or a worthy spiritual joy in the passage of a needed enlightened law or in the prevention of an iniquitous war? He observes that his elders are pleased over an invitation to a select social function and displeased at a fancied slight from a person of influence. Does he often see them warmed to a genuine glow of pleasure in a fine poem or a sunset or an act of heroism? Did he ever know his mother to make an effort to control her irritation over a small domestic calamity, such as a broken vase or a kettle of jelly which boils over, by visibly and openly calling to her aid the philosophical thought of its unimportance in the whole scheme of things? Will he learn from association with her the good cheer that is to be had from the hearty appreciation of some homely act of good-will, as when the grocer takes the trouble to put a single piece of candy in

a bag to please the two-year-old? Will he unconsciously absorb from either parent the habit of making his daily mental diet out of large, impersonal, uplifting interests; enlightened tenement-house regulation, the playground movement, the improvement of the schools? Will they teach him to refresh his mind with the solacing esthetic or studious pursuits, with training himself to judge a picture from an artist's point of view, with tracing in the confusion of general history the long spiral of human development? Will their example lead him to turn for relaxation to harmless, cheerful amusements—a good game of tennis, a well-kept garden, a well-written novel?

It may be in such a disinterested survey of your home you would find the finest influence in your children's lives is the sunny good cheer and unconscious bracing philosophy of the young Irish or Swedish girl in your kitchen. It may be you would find that the only sense of literary animation in their lives comes during the weekly story-telling or poetry-reading hour at school. It may be that the only experience of simple, wholesome joy in life for the sake of living reaches them through the jolly, good-natured negro, who comes to help out at house-cleaning time; and that the satisfaction which results from a worthy task well performed is revealed to them for the first time by the perspiring pride of a market-gardener in his long, well-kept rows of cabbages and tomatoes. Have we, as a matter of fact,

any secret of spiritual joy and beauty to teach our children? The spiritual food on which we ourselves live is all that we can provide for them. Have we any philosophy of life? Is it a good one? Do we nourish ourselves on the noble things of the spirit, the great things of the mind, and suitable, wholesome pleasures for the body? Or are we feeding our souls on vanity and envy, our brains on trivialities, and our bodies on weakening indulgences of sloth and appetite?

In other words, if you were a child, able consciously to choose a home and parents, who would help you to equip yourself for the hard business of living some threescore-and-ten years, with intelligence and fortitude, and good cheer, would you choose the home you are giving your children?

Of course, the only honest answer anyone can make to such a penetrating and solemn question is a shuddering "No!" and the only use of putting it in such a radical and thoroughgoing way that it cannot help harrowing up one's soul with the revelation of one's shortcomings is to direct one's efforts to bettering matters. We frail and unworthy parents, who are but plain human beings in spite of the great responsibilities placed upon us, cannot hope to be ideal companions and leaders for our children, but after all we *are* their parents, the only ones they can ever have. It hardly seems too much for us to hope that we may be as good companions as scout-masters or educative play-leaders, or play-

ground supervisors, who are, in spite of their imposing modern names, only human beings themselves. The point is that no longer having a monopoly of the job of bringing up the children, we no longer enjoy the monopolist's immunity from competition. We must look to our guns and keep our powder dry if our fortress of the family is not to be captured by our more worthy competitors; and what is more to the purpose, we must steal the ammunition of the other side. An alert business man does not meekly let a rival supply all the market with a desirable commodity. An alert father might see to it that the scout-master does not supply his boys with all the comradeship and manly ideals of honest work and fun they know. An alert mother might see to it that her girls do not make up their ideals of good taste and culture and refined womanliness solely from the various teachers on whom they have "crushes."

It is considered one of the hardships of a parent's life that in the matter of being an ideal for his children, he cannot compete with the other adults, because his children see him every day in the terribly searching dry light of ordinary life, whereas others they see only at intervals, through the illusory haze of special occasions. But in reality this is the parent's strongest hold, the unique advantage of his position. We can none of us hope to seem perfect to our children if they know us well, for the simple reason that we are not perfect. But we can hope to seem to them something that is better than perfect,

and that is honestly endeavoring to live better each day than on the day before. That achievement, and it is as fine as the finest, is within the reach of the most faulty of us. We may not hope always to be perfectly reasonable and just in our dealings with children, but we can, if we will, show to them the steady example of an honest effort to be reasonable and just. We may not even be able always to control our tempers, but we can at least make manifest our honest remorse at having been bad-tempered. We have the chance which no one else less intimately associated with the children can have, of initiating them gently into the great truth, the redeeming fact in life, that human beings may be very imperfect and yet be worthy of respect, admiration, and affection.

An esteem which is founded solidly on the intimate and ruthless knowledge between members of a family is an enduring ideal that will stand all the hard knocks of later disillusionment. It will be bedrock under the feet of the young travelers among the very uncertain stones of their earthly pilgrimage.

The knowledge gained insensibly through repeated experiences that his mother is trying hard to rise above pettiness will certainly be more stimulating to similar effort on the part of a child than contemplation from a distance of a character already entirely purified from pettiness, if any such exists! And by this I do not mean that a mother should spend all her time reading Bergson and take no interest in her clothes. I mean simply that a mother should try

hard to realize that her clothes are not the most important things in her life, and should apply her philosophy to the cooking of a meal.

Thus, after all, it is not the impossible that is demanded of us by the modern world, but only the difficult. We are asked by circumstances to achieve the feat of making our own lives worth living so that they may be worth sharing with our children. There is hope for us, erring though we be. If we master the first great lesson, that we must not pretend to the children to be anything that we are not, and yet at the same time make a daily effort to become what we are not, there is a chance that we may not be superseded, and that when the children arrive at maturity we may be friends of theirs, possibly, if we are very good, even intimate friends.

## ON NOT TAKING THE CHILDREN TOO SERIOUSLY

I AM credibly informed that parents may be broadly divided into two classes, the over-anxious and the too-negligent. At the very beginning I would take care to warn the too-negligent ones that not a word of this brief discussion is written for them, if I believed in the existence of that brand of parent. But I do not. I encounter them in books and in dreadful stories retailed to me by people who pretend to know actual instances of their selfish neglect of their children, but the parents I actually meet are without exception fairly sweating blood in an endeavor to do their duty by the children. We who are in the thick of this momentous experience talk of little else when we are gathered together. We know we annoy the childless—we have a faint, dim recollection of how we were bored when we were childless—but we cannot stop for that. Our hearts are too full of the distracting and fascinating perplexities of our new job. We must pour them out to each other endlessly. It seems to me in moments of discouragement that I have seen every variety of foolish parent who can possibly exist and have run across every outrageously misguided method of training children, but I have never yet encountered

the spectacularly neglectful mother, who figures so largely in magazine stories and novels-with-a-purpose, who plays bridge all day and dances all night, leaving her children to learn profanity and filth in the gutter. It is my conviction that if such parents ever existed, they are now as extinct as the dodo.

And my further conviction is that when they disappeared there was lost with them a desirable element of life, entangled paradoxically, as desirable elements so often are, with their traditional perverse and wayward habits. They may not have endured the heat and burden of the day, they may not have hoed and watered and weeded as we fatigued and harried parents do, but at least their predilection for comfortable chairs on the shady porch kept them from pulling up the little plants to see if their roots were growing. But we who remain have no such blessed repose; we have "thought ourselves tired," over the great crisis of parenthood, we are willing to give up the last drop of blood for the children. Alas! there is no such simple and easy solution open to us. Giving up one's blood solves few problems: it leaves the giver little power to continue living and doing his duty; it would give the children nothing of any value to them. Healthy organisms can seldom profit from other people's blood, and children have plenty of blood in their own veins which suits their purposes better than ours could; and what is more, unless we live our own lives and make those lives purposeful

and significant, we cannot be of service to any but very young children.

However, since one can never be sure of anything in this world, and since there may be still lingering on a lone specimen or two of the extinct species of parents who do not take their children seriously, I will, upon second thought, put down the warning I was considering, and say that not a word of what follows is meant for them. Having salved my conscience by this caution, let me ask those who are continuing to read to seek out a comfortable chair, to relax every muscle, and to take it easy while we embark upon a few considerations which may relieve the tension of our lives.

When my first baby was very young and I was bracing myself with all the serious-minded intensity of the modern young mother to do the right thing or die in the attempt, I remember seeking out my doctor with this impassioned plea for a definite rule of hygiene. "I want your trained scientific conclusion on a matter which people seem to differ radically about. One set of old women tell me the baby will certainly have cholera morbus and die if she isn't swathed in woolen, and another set say she will burst into prickly heat and hives if she has anything but the finest linen next her delicate skin. Now, *which is right?*"

The doctor looked at me whimsically. "Let me tell you one thing, although doctors usually keep it a secret from mothers. A healthy baby is very apt

to grow up all right, no matter what form of mania his mother's conscientiousness takes. Whether you use linen or cotton or woolen, if you keep your baby warm and dry and clean and comfortable, you can't keep her from growing up, no matter how much you worry over her!"

At the time I thought this the most evasive of generalizations and could extract only a chilly comfort from it, but the conversation has come back into my mind many times, and I have learned to smile with my wise doctor over the needless trouble we all put ourselves to "when hot for certainties in this our life." I have begun to see the folly of trying to be the motive power in the rushing advance of the children on to maturity. It is not only wise but infinitely comforting to realize that we have done everything humanly possible when we keep the boat comfortable, scraped clear of barnacles, and headed in the right direction; and that we must, whether willing or not, leave the rest to a power immeasurably greater than any we personally can furnish. We cannot do the children's growing for them. All that we can do is to supply the right background for their growth.

If it were not a spectacle so infinitely familiar to us all, it would be astounding to observe the almost perfect unanimity with which from wholesome, healthy homes and sane and cheerful families there emerges a new crop of wholesome, healthy, sane inhabitants of the world. We are blunted to the

wonder of it by the same dullness of eye which prevents our taking in the miracle of gardening. We put a row of seeds in the ground, pull out the worst of the weeds beside them, cultivate the ground a little, and occasionally put on a little water. That is all we have to do, all we can do; somehow out of every small dry horny scrap we put in the ground emerges a tall and complex organism, which produces fruit or flowers or edible roots, according to its nature, not in the least according to anything we have done. Somehow, if children are given plenty of sleep and enough nourishing food, a reasonable amount of almost any sort of instruction, not an overwhelming amount of scoldings, and a great deal of love, even misguided love, they develop from the troublesome, boisterous, immature beings over whose faults and failings we wring our hands in anguish into useful and conscientious members of the community, who in turn worry themselves into a fever lest they may not be doing all they should for *their* children. All that we have done by worrying over them and by seeing dreadful possibilities in each of their foibles is to embitter in their lives a few hours which otherwise would have been sweet. We are not content to do the best we can; we insist upon doing the best we can and then fretting about it into the bargain. We poison each small emergency with the anguish of apprehension until it swells up morbidly into a crisis, a deadly and irrevocable turning point. We face our undertaking with the fear of failure in our

hearts and, brooding over the possibilities of unhappiness involved in every trait of the children, we succeed effectively in destroying a good deal of the happiness they might be having at the present moment.

We can see no desirable future possible for Peter because of his incorrigible carelessness. He is really impossible. No threats, prizes, or exhortations can make him keep his room neat or can prevent his bicycle being left out in the rain over night or can induce him to tie his necktie properly. He is hopelessly at loose ends always and, as we prod and poke at him with various reforming devices, we peer anxiously and faint-heartedly into the busy, hard-headed, bitterly competitive business-world, in which poor Pete's faults will forever condemn him to failure. But when Pete grows up there is something more to him than carelessness, as there has always been something more to him than carelessness. That, though still troublesome, is almost lost sight of in the brilliance of a charming and winning personality. Unsoured by our loyal attempts to make him over into something he can never be, Peter looks upon the world and, with an irresistible smile, sees that it is good, has an instinctive perception of the companionable lying latent in even the most misanthropic of his fellows, and a magical capacity for drawing it out of them. And then, although Peter is still careless, his integrity is of the rock-ribbed variety (as it always has been, only we have been so busy moan-

ing over his inability to remember to hang up his overcoat that we could never see it). And, furthermore, Peter's judgment is sound, as it was even in his childhood, though we forgot to take it into consideration as we exclaimed about the valuable book left face downward on the grass. In short, Peter is a great success. He is not the kind of success we thought he ought to be. He is not as much of a success as he would have been if he had been able, as no one is, to combine quite contradictory good qualities, to be scrupulously exact, neat, and accurate, and yet possess the great fund of charitable tolerance and kindly divination of character which makes his presence an inspiration. But the fact remains that Peter is a distinct credit to us. There is another fact which remains also. We might have begun long ago, not to relax our efforts to train Peter (for they may have done some good after all), but after having done our best to train him, we might have begun to take pleasure in Peter's personality and to enjoy the sunshine he cast about him always.

I suppose there never was anyone in the world who tried to do anything who did not live through moments of unnerving depression. Each profession has its own brand of undermining self-doubt, which is declared by those who have endured it to be the hardest of all to battle with, but I think that parents have the right to claim the universal sympathy of the world for those black periods when imaginary failure

stares them in the face. Failure in their case is so deadly. The world needs their successes so much that it is fatally easy to lose a sense of proportion, and to fall into the mood when it seems that every painfully inculcated good habit of the children has given way to original sin. Harry's laziness will end by making a hobo of him, Molly simply will not tell the truth, Elizabeth's self-assertiveness and egotism are beyond anything, and Jack's "contrariness" makes it impossible to have any hold on him. If at such a time you have ever chanced to receive a visit from a gay, full-blooded young cousin in college, you may have been astonished to see how the mere presence of his infectious high spirits made the children over. The sight of his brilliant smile, though founded on nothing more creditable to him than youth and good health, the mere sound of his laughing voice, though it uttered nothing more worthy than the foolish refrain of the latest popular song, the mere poise of his alert body, though it performed not a useful or meritorious act, did more to change the moral atmosphere of the house from lowering cloudiness to breezy sunshine than all your dreary conscientious efforts to induce the children to "do what is right." Harry's laziness is electrified into energy, Molly forgets to prevaricate, Elizabeth runs willingly on errands and loses herself in service for others, and Jack's prickliness disappears entirely. Your undergraduate cousin has uttered no moral exhortation, has let fall no word of blame for the bad habits or of

praise for the good; he has not even set a specially good example, dropping the ash from his cigarettes all over the house, lounging in the best chairs, and forgetting to jump up to open the door for Great-aunt Amanda. But his vividly, though unconsciously, held conviction that it is the greatest fun in the world to be alive, and that the game is a thousand times worth the candle, has been like a burst of sunny, warm west wind on a sour, misty day. All the young growing things in our charge, which, under our cloudy sky of anxiety and apprehension and concentration on faults and defects, have been drooping and spindling and twisting with a weak perversity here and there, draw themselves upright, hold their heads high, and quivering with reflected vitality, thrust their roots deep into the life-giving earth, which sends up a flood of strength to every cell.

And yet our young cousin, though he has not a tithe of our responsibilities, has not a hundredth part of our reason for joy and exhilaration and trust in life. We parents with children still at home with us are passing through the richest part of our earthly pilgrimage. We touch life at more points, we are the medium through which pass more electrifying currents of hope and interest and effort, and forward-looking, we are privileged to love and protect and enjoy more intimately than ever before or after. We may become very wise and hard-working members of society after the children are grown up, we may manage settlement houses and diet kitchens,

and be leaders in club work or politics, and we will find solace and satisfaction and comfort in being useful to our fellow-men. But never again can we live so fully and so deeply as now. Never again will we be so near the limpid transparence of innocence or touch so closely a joyous acceptance of life as it is. And yet we cloud the brightness of all these swiftly passing delights because our utmost efforts will not make the children perfect, will not even make them into our own distorted idea of perfection, because we feel a gloomy Calvinistic responsibility for every episode of growth in the life of every child; because we will not trust the miraculous principle of growth to unfold the capacities from the human soul far better than we can unfold them; because we face the future with apprehension and not with confidence.

One of the old-time stories told in our family is concerned with a game of charades, played many years ago, when my aunt was a very small and very timid little girl. At some turn of the game a giant was a necessary part of the tableaux, and my grandfather was to play the part. Knowing little Mattie's exceeding propensity to panic, he took her on one side and explained the matter to her. "See, dear, in the next scene I'm going to pretend to be a giant, with this broomstick held high over my head. Aunt Mary is going to wrap a sheet around it, so, and then I'm going to fasten that jack-o'-lantern you and Jimmie made on top for a head." Thus fortified, little Mattie took her place in the audience, quite

pleased and important at being in the secret. At the given moment the curtain was drawn back and the huge white figure appeared, the jack-o'-lantern grinning from the top. There was appreciative applause from the spectators and—little Mattie went into a hysterical fit of terror, screaming and sobbing, and spoiling all the fun of the evening. After she had been finally quieted, my grandfather, with an exasperation which he thought justifiable, said to her: "Mattie, how *could* you be so foolish? I told you all about it. You knew what it was." Little Mattie's answer has become historic in our family. She sat up on the sofa and thus earnestly explained the matter to the circle about her: "Oh, yes, I *knew* it was just Father. I *knew* that! But I thought it *might* be a giant!"

I think of the story many times as I watch myself and other parents going into fits of nervous apprehension over habits in our children which we know well enough cannot survive their natural growth, if that is kept vigorous and sane. We know well enough that they will turn out all right, we know that we ourselves went through just such unpromising phases, we know that our brothers and our cousins and our husbands have settled down for the most part from being careless, lazy, irresponsible boys into hard-working, responsible, competent fathers of families, and we see innumerable instances of frivolous girls turning into useful and warm-hearted and industrious mothers, but we darken our

sky and the life of the children by our fears that just in their particular cases the laws of growth will not apply, that they will go on sucking their thumbs till they are in college, and after they are married will not remember to wash their faces before sitting down to dinner.

We can help them just as effectively to overcome their irresponsibility and fitfulness if we allow ourselves to believe what we know to be true, that they will outgrow those qualities. For that matter, we can help them very much more effectively to every good thing if we do not keep our eyes fixed on the unnerving chance of total failure. And we can get from them and communicate to them something of infinite value, the belief that life is good.

# OBEDIENCE

"'It is well with men,' Mr. Mill said, 'in proportion as they respect truth.' Now, they at once prove and strengthen their respect for truth by having an open mind to all its possibilities, while at the same time they hold firmly to their own proved convictions until they hear better evidence to the contrary. There is no anarchy nor uncertainty nor paralyzing air of provisionalness in such a frame of mind. So far is it from being fatal to loyalty or reverence that it is an indispensable part of the groundwork of the only loyalty that a wise ruler or teacher would care to inspire—the loyalty springing from a rational conviction that in a field open to all comers, he is the best man they can find. Only on condition of liberty without limit is the ablest and most helpful of heroes sure to be found, and only on condition of liberty without limit are his followers sure to be worthy of him. You must have authority, and yet you must have obedience. The noblest and deepest and most beneficent kind of authority is that which rests on an obedience that is rational and spontaneous."

JOHN MORLEY, *Compromise.*

## A SLIDING-SCALE FOR OBEDIENCE

I LAID down the *Woman's Magazine*, in which I was reading an admirably written article lamenting the decay among our modern children of the "sweet old fragrant virtue of unquestioning obedience," and greeted a neighbor, who had just come in. He brought us the latest news of an accident which had shocked our village a few days ago, and my husband and I listened with interest to the explanation of the catastrophe.

"The poor boy has recovered enough to tell how it all happened," said our neighbor. "It seems that the train came along just as he was going to drive over the crossing. He reined Topsy back on this side of the track, but as the cars kept going by so close to them, she got frightened and began to back. Harry was afraid she would back the wagon into the ditch, he gave her a cut with the whip to make her stay up in the road, and she sprang right into the moving train! The wagon is simply kindling-wood, and there isn't enough left of Topsy——!"

After he had gone out I cried impatiently: "Who would believe that a horse could be such an *idiot!*"

My husband looked up from his paper. "Why not?" he asked. "That's what a horse is trained to

do—to obey its driver, anybody who happens to hold the lines, no matter what the command may be." He laughed a little at my face of astonishment, and went on in an amused, casual, pseudo-philosophic harangue. "Why, yes, didn't you ever think of that? It wouldn't do to let a horse use his own judgment about anything, or even to have any judgment of his own. What would happen if his opinion and yours didn't agree? A horse's business is to obey, literally, anybody who issues a command, and a good horse-trainer is one who empties out from his horse's head any desire or capacity for independent action, and puts back an absolute faith in the omniscence of humanity, and a perfect willingness to govern its life always by the dictates of that superior being, Man. Didn't you ever think of the significance of the phrase, a 'well-*broken* horse'?"

With which he went back to his newspaper and I to my article on the training of children. The writer was deploring the "disobedience of American children." "How many of you mothers," she asked, "could as a test-case tell your fourteen-year-old school-girl daughter to-morrow morning to wear her rubbers to school and be sure of her acquiescence? Would it not mean with nearly all of you a long 'argument' with her about the need for doing this, an impatient statement from her that she 'hates rubbers' and is '*sure* it won't rain,' and a final compromise on your part that she shall not (in spite of what you have ordered) wear her rubbers, but only

take them along in her school-bag in case it does rain?"

As so frequently happens in our inconsequent human life, an entirely accidental sequence of unimportant incidents somehow between them struck out a searching ray of light, which streamed importunately into a neglected corner of my brain and made me see what I had not suspected before, that it was littered with broken-down superstitions and rickety medieval ideals, festooned in dusty cobwebs of contradictory notions—altogether violently in need of a house-cleaning. It had honestly never occurred to me before that there might be more to the question of children's obedience than the difficulty (always so great) of getting them to obey. That had seemed to me quite enough of a problem in the life of parents!

I naturally said to myself, in answer to the writer who deplored the insubordination of the fourteen-year-old school-girl: "Why, she wants the child to act like a horse!" Which led me, of course, into a consideration of the difference, if any, between colts and children. In fact, the main difference seems to be the ultimate destination of the two young animals. The colt is to grow up in an utter and implicit reliance on human beings into a horse who will always have human beings set in authority over him. The child begins with a similar entire reliance on adults; but with the most disconcerting rapidity he grows swiftly to be an adult himself, who must not only govern his own life, but in most cases has very soon thrust

upon him the awful responsibility of being in his turn an all-wise adult for little children. Horses can without danger to themselves acquire the habit of unquestioning obedience to any human being, because there will always be in their lives some human being for them unquestioningly to obey; but children may not, without grave danger to themselves, become fixed in the habit of unquestioning obedience to adults, because in the nature of things such a habit can only be a temporary matter. A wise man once said: "Nothing is more perilous than to begin a habit which cannot be kept up forever." It is a physical impossibility for children to continue forever obeying their elders. When are they to stop?

In former times this ticklish question was answered in the case of boys by the universal application of a legal fiction that up to the midnight before their twenty-first birthday they are colts, and after the clock has struck twelve times they are human beings. As for girls, they formerly never attained admitted humanity. They were kept bitted and bridled by their parents until a husband was safely in the saddle, passing thus docilely and without surprise from one sovereign to another, as provinces and nations used to do. But some degree of self-government has come irrevocably into fashion during the last century and a half, not only for provinces and nations, but for individual human beings. The need for it is universally admitted. The very writer who would like to have her fourteen-year-old girl accept her

mother as the exclusive fountain-head of wisdom on the subject of rubbers, would not in the least wish her, only four years later (if she were to marry young) to telephone downtown to her husband to ask if she should put on her overshoes. A wife who would be unquestioningly obedient to her husband in all details, and who would ask and accept from him constant and minute supervision of the conduct of her life, would bore and exasperate a modern American husband as much as she would puzzle and amaze him. And yet we feel passionately and sometimes tragically the need to train our children to be obedient, and this feeling comes from a sure, strong, and wise primal instinct—for a disobedient child is an abomination, a danger to himself and a menace to others, quite as much as an unruly horse. If then the duty of children and of horses is identical as far as the necessity of being obedient is concerned, what is the difference between them? The point must be that they should obey different things. If it will not do to teach a child passive unquestioning obedience to adults because that is a habit which must be abandoned as soon as he is grown up, what force is there which, like the horse, he can continue to obey all his life?

When one runs the investigation into a corner in this fashion the answer is so simple as to be commonplace. The child (like all the rest of us) can and should and must obey Law. Not his parents because they are his parents, but because they are for

him the representatives and enforcers of the Law. And the sooner he understands this intellectual distinction and begins this mental habit, the better citizen of his world he will be at every stage of his growth. The very little child, like the very ignorant immigrant, cannot grasp this abstract difference. He must, therefore, obey his mother because she tells him to and smacks him when he does not, just as the frightened Russian Jew "moves on" because somebody in a blue coat and shiny buttons waves a club at him and issues an order to that effect. A certain amount of coerced, unintelligent, horse-like obedience is necessary in both family and national life as a rough-and-ready temporary expedient for the maintenance of public order. But it should be the main business of good government and of competent parents to keep this unintelligent obedience at its irreducible minimum. With the first dawning of the ability to reason, the sliding-scale for obedience should be instituted, and adjusted on a basis of quick flexibility to the capacity of each child at every stage of his development. With the passage of every day of growth the child should learn to obey more rationally than before. It is not only not reasonable to expect a girl of fourteen to obey as a child of five should—she should not be allowed to sell her birthright, even if she is willing to. As soon as possible, if we are to have a healthy national life, the cowering immigrant must be taught that it is not the brass-buttoned bluecoat which is the rightful

object of his veneration. As soon as possible, if we are to have a healthy family life, children must be prepared fully for the responsibilities so soon to be laid on them, and to this end they must be taught that their duty is not to obey their parents' personal wishes, but the universal laws which their parents, by virtue of their position and greater experience, expound to them and enforce upon them.

This means not less obedience but more, vastly more, for it is the beginning of that universal obedience which we should all practice assiduously, which should in a rightly developing personality become more and more absolute with every year, until the main business of life is to discover and understand universal laws and then to obey them with an utter abnegation of our own wishes and no thought or even wish to revolt.

Now, this is a habit which, like all other good ones, starts with small beginnings and increases very gradually, with many struggles and much backsliding from grace. Consequently the sooner it is allowed to begin in the life of children, the more consistently it is held before them as the way of virtue and the path of duty, the better; and the less it is confused and clouded by recourse to appeals to mere brute authority or with attempts to work upon sensitive childish emotions, the better.

But such a habit is not easily acquired, either by parent or child. "Not by sitting upon down comes a man to fame," says Dante grimly, nor, let us

amend, does the laziest road lead to anything else desirable, such as the feat of being a good mother. It is much easier for us muddle-headed adults to treat our little children like colts than like human beings. It requires a constantly vigilant, self-critical, alert, and well-poised intellect to use the sliding-scale for obedience. To beat into children's heads either by physical or moral suasion the conception that they must obey because someone has told them to is a short-cut, autocratic route to a superficially tranquil family life; but under the veneer of good order it forces the children ruled by it, according to their temperaments, into the habits either of sly, secret disobedience, of crushed passive submission, or of sullen and unavailing revolt; and these are not very desirable mental habits for creatures who are soon to be masters of their own fates, although such children may have the other habit, so comfortable for adults, of "jumping" at the word of command.

Everyone must have experienced the fury of impatience we all naturally feel at a child who stands and "argues" when something is suggested to him. It is certainly very much more convenient for the adult to have him, like a well-oiled toy, when the string is pulled or the button pressed, perform whatever trick is required. And yet how else except by "arguing" is a child to learn the logical grounds on which wise action should be based? It is true that much childish and especially school-girlish "argument" is nothing

but disingenuous special pleading, intended to confuse the issue and to tire out the patience of the opponent. This should, of course, receive the sharp reprobation and quick, decisive silencing which all dishonest special pleading deserves. But, more than we think, there is apt to be at least the germ on the child's part of an honest desire to see if the reasons for that particular action are sound and convincing. Such a desire, being one of the most indescribably precious of mental impulses, should be fostered and fed on the best mental food available, and not silenced for the sake of attaining a preconceived ideal of inflexible military order.

What do we do, any of us, when we try to decide what action is best to take, but carry on with ourselves the same sort of "argument" we used to have with our parents? By what other method can we come to a wise decision? To weigh the pros and cons of a situation wisely and honestly and clear-headedly, and then to act according to his best judgment, is all that can be expected of the best of men. And to do this is a difficult intellectual feat for which we all need to be trained by well-chosen, well-directed, and infinitely repeated practice.

To go back to the article which is the text of my remarks, it seems to me that the mother who finally compromised and allowed her daughter to carry her rubbers on a threatening day instead of wearing them acted in the most enlightened manner. Like a good judge hearing a case and taking into consid-

eration extenuating circumstances, she had received the testimony of the defendant that it is a great affliction to a fourteen-year-old girl to wear rubbers over dry pavements, and had wisely yielded that non-essential point, although holding strictly to the essential one that rubbers should be at hand when it rains.

For the fact that we are not law-makers but only law-enforcers does not mean that we may be more yielding than the type of parent who cries: "You do it because I say so!" Such a parent can with perfect ease say something else or even unsay, as the mood changes, what he has said the moment before; and the children know this, as they know everything about the weak points of those who are trying to lead them. Not so the expounder of an eternal law. He is as helpless before the majesty of the authority he represents as the child itself. If he is true to his trust, to his position as chief magistrate in the world of his children, he may not vary by a jot or a tittle from a well-considered verdict. His "commands" are infinitely fewer than those of the tyrant, but having issued them he does not repeal them. Not for him the whimsies, the unexpected reprieves so characteristic of the irresponsible tyrant. Take a very simple case, easily analyzed and very frequent in our everyday experience, the case of the child recovering from an attack of indigestion who has been forbidden candy by the doctor. That child must not have candy. There is

nothing more to be said about it. Here is a law of health to be obeyed by the parent, whose duty is to aid childhood to a similar intelligent obedience, but who, before capacity for self-control is fully acquired, acts as police officer to the as yet ungoverned instincts of the child under his care, and enforces obedience, not to himself, but to an abstract law, the law that it is our duty to society to avoid ill-health as much as possible. The fact that most cases are not so simple as this, and that frequently the parent must himself be the doctor who decides what the law of health is, as well as the expounder and enforcer of it, only makes the task of the parent a more difficult and complicated one. It does not in the least release him from his solemn obligation to be the most intelligent variety of parent within his capacity.

There is little danger that a child brought up in the full rigor of this law-abiding régime will be either disobedient in the course of his training or lawless when he is left, as an adult, to govern himself. He will have had the precious experience of living the life of any citizen of an enlightened community. He will have had in all questions and disputes a fair chance to defend himself, to explain his point of view, to present his arguments, and to hear a dispassionate presentation of the other side. And then, like every citizen of a civilized community, he will have learned the tremendously vital lesson that if the decision of the fair-minded judge in the highest court of appeals goes against him, he must

abide by that irrevocable result. There is a finality about decisions made on abstract grounds which, even in the case of small children, is never present when personality or mere authority are allowed to enter into the discussion; when, for instance, one of the arguments is the unfair, overbearing one of: "Oh, do it to please me!" If there is no better reason than that, the child in yielding may be performing a pretty and graceful act, but an act into which the element of right and wrong cannot enter. And obedience, being as it is one of the most indispensable elements of civilized life, is too righteous and serious a matter to prettify or play with or, above all, to falsify. A child, the heir of humanity, should not be required, not even once, to give up his birthright of dignity and personal integrity in order to obey the whims or personal fancies of any other human being. This is too grave a matter to trifle with. He should be told truthfully that it would be a kind or generous or graceful act if he would consent of his own free will thus to please someone whom he loves; but it should not, it cannot, be demanded of him as a right. On the other hand, nothing, not an inch of concession, even with the most specious plea, should be allowed him when it is a question of evading his obedience to a law which involves his duty to the world.

No mother has a right to command her daughter to perform the useless act of wearing rubbers over dry pavements, but every mother is held by virtue of

her position to a rigid enforcement upon her children of the proposition that one of the first duties of every human being is, so far as possible, to keep in good health. Wet feet are prejudicial to good health. Therefore, the essential point at issue is, not to force the school-girl to obey her mother's chance commands literally, but to bring to her attention a situation which will recur innumerable times in the later course of her life, to secure her intelligent consideration of the general principle involved and to enforce (if necessary) her wise action. If inspired thereto by her nearness to the problem and by her vivid personal preferences, she is able to invent a course of action which will be at the same time wise and not distasteful to her (even though it be different from her mother's prescribed course), it seems to me that we can have nothing but admiration for her ingenuity and a very tranquil mind about the conduct of her life in the future. She has taken one more step towards learning thoroughly not how to obey her mother, which she would need in a few years painfully to unlearn, but how to deal skillfully and honestly with the problems of her life.

And if her mother feels that her " authority " has been infringed upon by this bit of intellectual flexibility on her daughter's part and that her dignity has been injured because an ill-considered command has not been literally obeyed, because her daughter has bowed to an abstract law and not to her mother's personality, there are two things she can do to mend

matters. She can cultivate her own intellectual flexibility until she can analyze more accurately a situation into its essential elements and hence fit the command more deftly to the need or she can leave twentieth-century, modern, self-governing America and bring up her children in a remote corner of Russia. That seems to be almost the only refuge in the world left to her, unless, indeed, she takes to breaking horses.

## OBEDIENCE AS A TRANSITIVE VERB

THERE is nothing more curious or fascinating to a reflective mind than the outward similarity between a wire which is charged with electricity and one which is a mere strip of harmless metal. It is a phenomenon of modern life which impresses the imagination on the same side as that touched by the old idea of magic. There they are, the little copper strands, all looking exactly alike. You can handle them, all but one, as you would sewing thread, but if you touch that one a living force originating miles away leaps tingling through your body.

This phenomenon is reproduced with great accuracy in the world of thought. The tangle of question and problems concerning child-training is tremendous. Nearly everything is being questioned and discussed, and one may walk about freely lifting and handling all sorts of subjects without receiving more than a politely interested attention from conscientious parents. Shall children go to school early or late? How about the kindergarten *versus* the Montessori school? Shall children wear half-hose in winter or flannel drawers? How shall we answer their difficult questions? How about social life for adolescents? How can we teach the little ones to use their hands? How about nature-study? When

any one of these questions is propounded to the modern parent a genteelly animated discussion is insured. They are, in fact, the subject of many a tea-table talk, proceeding to the clink of spoons in cups, and punctuated by much-savored mouthfuls of sandwiches and wafers. Misled by this genial appearance of willingness to consider open-mindedly all questions relating to child-training, I felt the utmost freedom, when I first began writing on the subject, to ramble about among those innumerable problems, noting actual conditions as acutely as I could, reading the best authorities I could find, applying the clearest logic at my command, and dropping upon my conclusions the testing acid of practical experience with real children. Coming in this manner upon the subject labeled "obedience," I gave it the scrutinizing examination one feels necessary before forming a careful opinion on any subject, and did my best to consider the true merits of the case. I was rather surprised at the results of my meditations, and, hoping they might chance to interest some other parents, I wrote them down in the form of the preceding pages of this essay.

Their publication turned an electric current of the highest voltage all through my unsuspecting person. Inadvertently I had laid my hands on a live wire, on *the* live wire in the relations of parents to children. Professional educators may pull hair as they will over the necessity for educating the motor-sensory powers or for training the capacity

for inhibition, and parents will look on at the contest with a bright, cheerful interest. But let the question of obedience be brought up, even for the most abstract discussion, and we leave our comfortable spectators' seats and rush into the arena, every man-Jack and woman-Jill of us, the light of battle in our eyes. My mail was immediately swollen with letters from strangers who argued the case heatedly with me. And I was set upon by nearly everyone I met, from all my cousins and remote kin to people who had that instant been presented to me. Not long ago an entire stranger stopped me on the street, made sure who I was, and after having prefaced his remarks with some amiable generalities about reading my articles with interest, said earnestly: "But I do think you are all off on the subject of obedience! Wet weather or fair weather, that girl ought to have worn her rubbers if her mother said so, whether there was any other reason for it or not. Children should mind their parents or the world will come to an end." And only this very morning, just before I sat down to my desk to work, I had a fresh illustration of how entirely the heat felt on the subject had caused my attitude on the matter to be misunderstood. My four-year-old daughter was protesting vigorously against the morning dash of cold water on her throat and chest, and as I led her along to the bathroom I was saying briskly: "Well, but you know it keeps you from having sore-throats and colds, Sally, dear; so come along quickly and

let's have it over with." A visiting relative overheard the remark and cried triumphantly, as though catching me in an inconsistency: "Well, I notice your *own* children mind!" adding in answer to my "Why, I should hope so!" "*Why* should you hope so when you advise other people to the contrary?"

The kernel of the whole matter turns upon the object of that transitive verb, "to obey." What is the child to obey? Is he to continue, as he must in babyhood, obeying the will of another because it is stronger? Or is he little by little to be initiated into the idea that the will of another is to be obeyed only when the commands are righteous?

We are all of one mind, to begin with. Practically all the disputants involved (except a negligible and dwindling minority of fanatical followers of Nietzsche) agree unanimously that the child must obey. No argument is necessary so far. We all move along together over the same road. A little beyond this, however, a by-path forks off and we lose a certain small number of our company, stanch old aristocrats, who have survived the French Revolution of ideas, who are still loyal to the old régime of autocracy, and who, pressed to a clear exposition of their ideas, refuse to base their claims for the obedience of children on any paltering modern notions about the superior wisdom and righteousness of the parents. They claim boldly that children ought to obey because it is right for people to submit themselves to

authority without questioning if that authority is good or bad. Authority, they insist, is not, as most moderns believe, a means to an end, but a positive good in itself, without regard to its purpose; and the sooner children learn to accept this in their relations with their parents, the better for all concerned. Such anachronistic figures are rare and rapidly becoming rarer, and we can safely ignore them, leaving them to voice the theory of the sanctity of unfounded authority, along with those other picturesque relics, the people who believe in the divine right of kings, in the principle of caste, in the degradation connected with working for a living.

But after we have left behind us this quaint Old Guard, valiantly fighting a battle decided a century ago, we are deserted by a slightly larger number of those who find it hard, and indeed unseemly, to reason clearly about anything so sacred to them as the principle of parental authority. They are not insensible to the facts of the case. They grant when it is insistently called to their attention that an enormous change of opinion has taken place since the Roman theory that children were the absolute possessions of their father, who held the right of life and death over them. They do not succeed in shutting their eyes to the fact that modern society does not in the least recognize the parents' complete authority over the child, since every civilized society reserves to itself the right to take away a child from people who are not treating it well, even if

those people happen to be its very own flesh-and-blood parents. They concede that all this points unmistakably to a growing conviction in the world that the basis of parental authority is solely the ultimate good of the child and hence of society; but having been unwillingly conveyed thus far by logic, they refuse utterly any further transportation by that motive force. They refuse to admit that a total change of opinion about the basis of parental authority calls for any change in mental attitude on the part of the parent or on the part of the child, or for any readjustment of the relation between parent and child. And since they refuse to allow any former admission on their part to be made the basis of further argument, it is somewhat difficult to continue talking the matter over with them. As nearly as an outsider can make out, however, their feeling is that it is all very well for parents to admit that their authority arises solely from their capacity to do what is best for the child, but that this abstract proposition is altogether too stimulating a draught for young heads. Their position is the one taken from time immemorial by partisans of a creed which they themselves no longer believe, the position that some creed is necessary, and that the reasonable and believable one which they hold is too good for other people. Their doctrine is that parents should know that their authority rests upon reason, but that if at any given moment their authority and reason should not coincide, reason should not be allowed for an

instant to interfere with their authority, lest the children might suspect that their authority is not absolute and arbitrary, but (as it is in fact) based on reason. Since there are few moderns who, if the choice is clearly put to them, quite dare even to appear to prefer authority to reason, we need not stop to argue with that small minority who do, and leaving these augurs solemnly insisting that winking is a necessary part of any religion, we can press forward still for all practical purposes a united band.

We are united on the dogma that parents, knowing far better than their children what is good for them, have a right to exact obedience from them on this ground, and we all believe that this eminently sane, enlightened, and just claim should be expounded to the children. In fact, we all do expound it to the children, eulogizing the great extent of our worth to them and taking ourselves as oracles and prophets with a seriousness which only the divine loyalty of very little children can contemplate with a straight face. In angry tones we exhort them to self-control and patience, and, simmering openly with petty irritation, we explain that we hold the right to dictate to them on the ground of our superior virtue. But this is beside the mark. The fact remains that all the company of parental pilgrims who have gone along with us on this journey of inquiry fully believe that there should be a frank avowal that the claim to obedience from children rests on the same basis as the claim to obedience from the citizens of an en-

lightened State, namely, on considerations of righteousness and the general good of the community. But here let us say an anticipatory farewell to those who have been our companions, for at this point the road takes a sudden turn, rounds a sharp corner, and leads forward into unsuspected regions. Almost without exception the entire band of parents stops short here, utterly refusing to set one foot before the other, even though the road before them is the plain continuation of the one over which they have been treading so firmly. For after telling the child that he must obey his parents because their commands lead him to do what is right, the next step is, of course, to admit that if it happens that he can do what is right without obeying his parents, or if rightness is not in question at all, he is at liberty to obey or not, as he thinks best. From this chilling wind of logic, blowing cheerlessly upon pretensions to parental autocracy, nearly all of us shrink back, covered with the gooseflesh of extreme apprehension. We are willing to allow our children the knowledge of the rational basis for their obedience, but we are terrified at the idea of allowing them ever to act upon that knowledge or, indeed, even to exercise their wits freely in regard to it. Our idea of giving it to them strikingly resembles the idea of the traditional South or Central American dictator in giving the vote to the citizens of his state. They may have it, since it is the modern fashion for citizens to have votes, but they must do nothing with it.

If we are so constituted (as a good many modern people are) that we feel rather ashamed of openly casting away logic as a guide to conduct, we hasten to collect as many reasons as possible which show that this particular logical step, although sound in theory, is dangerous and pernicious in practice. We feel very proud of the cogent look of many of these reasons, and, turning them adroitly till their very best side is most visible, we hold them up before us in the manner of shields between us and our own sense of justice.

### *How About Emergencies?*

The excuse which is perhaps the most plausible of all and which occurs first to most people is concerned with the question of sudden emergencies. They reply to the argument, "If obedience ought to be used only as a means of securing the child's best interest, surely it should not be insisted upon as a good in itself when the interest of the child is not at all in question," by triumphantly putting another question. They ask with a crow of triumph: "How about emergencies?" Well, there is something in that, perhaps. *How* about emergencies? Let us look into this. If you form the habit of explaining to a child the reasons for his obedience, if you say to him that he must not eat candy between meals, not because his father says he must not, but because it will make him sick; if you explain to him that he must go to bed early, not because his

mother has an eccentric desire that he should, but solely because it is necessary for his healthy growth; if you insist that he must eschew walking on the railroad track, not because your own taste does not run in that direction, but because children occasionally get killed on railroad tracks, will he not perhaps refuse to obey you on an occasion when you have no time to explain the reasons to him or when the reasons are such that he cannot understand them? This certainly has a plausible sound, and most people are quite content with it, urging that if Peter does not obey a suggestion to brush his teeth with panic-stricken alacrity he will stand on the deck of a sinking ship and argue with his parents about the advisability of jumping into a boat.

There are several remarks to make upon this theory. The first one is that it is our duty to train the child for life, and that life is not composed of extreme emergencies, when almost any action, provided it is quick and energetic, is better than hesitation over alternatives. Life is composed of innumerable incidents in which the clear and lucid exercise of the reason is essential to good action, and for all but a minute number of experiences it is exercise in the use of his reason which the child needs. The course of our own adult life proves our instinctive sense of this need to adapt our lives to the usual rather than the very exceptional. For instance, we know perfectly well that our American wooden houses can burn down, do often burn down, and that burn

ing is a painful way to meet death, but we do not shape all the details of our lives to avoid this dreadful possibility. We take a few reasonable precautions and trust to our resourcefulness in an emergency. We would be well laughed at by all sensible people if we should have rope ladders hanging from every window and insist that every member of the family should partake of a daily fire-drill up and down the rungs. Precautions like these might be reasonable for people working in a paint-and-oil factory, but they would quite unnecessarily embitter the life of an ordinary family living in an ordinary manner.

The conditions are precisely similar in child-life. I have no taste or capacity for elaborate mathematical computations, so that I cannot figure up the number of moments in a child's conscious life. I dare say it runs into the millions. Out of this, in the ordinary course of American life, it must be an ample allowance to guess that there may be five in which the child's welfare seriously depends upon his instant, unquestioning obedience to a sudden command, although in our safely-run settled communities there are many lives in which there occurs literally no such real emergency. But even so, how about those potential five? As an actual fact it will be found that the child who has always lived under the quiet civilized rule of avowedly rational authority will be much more quick and sure to respond to the sudden unexplained shout of command in a

moment of real danger than the child who has been used to sudden unexplained shouts of command about things that did not really matter in the least. There is a certain very old story about a boy who shouted, "Wolf!" which bears on the blunting of the sense of danger by repeated false alarms.

The ear of any human being not an imbecile can detect instantaneously the note of reality in a cry of warning or a command of necessity. The most imperious and self-willed dowager in existence would not stop to rebuke the rudeness of a workman shouting a warning to her to step back from under a descending crane. She is human; every nerve in her body would respond involuntarily to his look, his gesture, the quality of his voice. For the instant she would obey him implicitly with an obedience founded on the excellent reason that for the moment he knows better than she what is good for her, and it is apparent to her that he does. How much more does the sensitive, impressionable nature of childhood respond instinctively to the accent of real danger, and to the authority of knowledge really greater than theirs. They no more stop to argue than we do with the conductor who suddenly runs through the train halted on a siding shouting to the passengers to get out at once. Under ordinary circumstances no one in the car would dream of ordering his life according to the dictates of that stranger in uniform, but as a matter of fact not the most stiff-necked stickler for personal independence would

stop at that moment to ask on what ground he was undertaking to order people about. Without exception everybody would descend in all haste and make inquiries afterwards. And it is safe to count upon this absolutely unvarying human instinct in the case of children.

Indeed, it is not only safe to count upon this instinct, always present in the human heart, but it is much safer not to abuse it by frequent appeals to it. It is the instinct which springs up spontaneously in a real emergency. We will do well to reserve it for such occasions and not dull its keenness by trying to employ it on occasions for which it is not at all suitable. In any case such emergencies are exceptions, and rare ones, to the general rule and conduct of life, and no more invalidate the practicability of the independence of the child than the presence of policemen invalidates American self-government. Just as policemen enter hardly at all into the life of the average healthy adult, so dogmatism need enter very rarely into healthy child-life, and then as a necessary evil, to be dispensed with as soon as possible.

But there is another form of emergency in which no haste in obeying a command is necessary, but where the need is for some painful action. These are genuine emergencies which do really occur in the course of every life. Every child nowadays must go to the dentist, must take medicine, must submit to more or less cold water, must follow the doctor's

orders in illness. No child likes any of these processes. Is there not danger, if the dead weight of absolute autocratic authority is removed from his will, that he will rebound into absolute refusal to undergo anything painful? This is a new case to consider. Let us begin with a statement of the ground on which autocratic authority rests. This is in all cases the possession of superior force by the person claiming the authority. The dictator of a badly-governed state uses force as his method for compelling obedience because he can without process of law send a detachment of soldiers and carry off an unruly person to prison. And yet there have been a certain number of cases of religious or political martyrs when the determination of the weaker party was sufficient to resist autocratic authority, even when enforced by the extreme of physical violence ending in death. Again, the man uses force, both mental and physical, in enforcing absolute obedience upon the horse. He uses the force and coherence of his wits to seek out the animal's weak points and he can in most cases severely hurt or even kill the horse without being hurt himself. And yet there is a certain proverb about leading a horse to water which indicates that to make him drink is beyond the power of the most violent form of authority. The autocratic authority used for the child rests exactly on the same relative inequality of mental and physical force between the person claiming authority and the person granting obedi-

ence. And the same phenomena are to be observed as in other cases of such authority. The more distasteful and painful the action to be performed, the more force is necessary to achieve obedience, until there comes a point when the pain of the action involved outweighs the pain of the penalty for disobedience, and then force is no longer operative against the determination of the weaker member.

It is not the child with a lifetime habit of thinking about good reasons for doing things who will at a pinch wildly and furiously refuse to take a nauseating medicine. He may struggle and protest and be very unhappy at the need for such action, and when he is still young with but a small capacity for self-control he will need to be helped by adult strength to the accomplishment of the difficult deed, but he is also helped by his own small but trained mind, which tells him from the very center of his little ego that the disagreeable action is necessary and that there is no use in revolting from what is necessary. The child whose resistance is really thoroughgoing, who must be strapped and gagged before he will let the black mixture be put into his mouth, is the child who has revolted entirely from arbitrary authority. He usually accepts it because it is the lesser of two evils, but if the other evil in a given case is worse, he throws every atom of his small personality into one united whole and engages in what is, so far as his feeling goes, a perfectly righteous attempt at self-preservation.

## THE CHILD AS PHILOSOPHER

Perhaps the most fundamental and thoughtful of the excuses given for not acting logically in regard to obedience, for believing modern ideas about the value of wholesome freedom, but continuing to practice one or another method for suppressing it, is the statement that it is very difficult for the child to understand the difference between submission to the will of another and obedience to the principle of rightness. This must be admitted. It is hard for the child. It is hard for anyone. Precisely because it is hard for us to understand this clearly we find it hard to reason about our own parental authority. But everyone will admit that it is one of the few things really worth teaching the child or understanding ourselves. To have grasped the conception that one must yield up his life only to what is right is to have entered upon the only variety of life worth living. The one thing which in real life brings us happiness is a glad and enlightened acceptance of righteousness as a guiding principle, not a hostile, enforced, or even painlessly automatic submission to other people's wills. Why should we try to make the child learn the bad habit before the good? Why should we not try to fix his attention upon the fact that it is not his parents' will which rules his world,

but righteous and eternal laws. Why not teach him that if in any way he can reconcile his wish and what is right he is free to do so? Why thrust him, devoured with the desire for activity as he is, into the prison of inaction, blinded and gagged by the command, "Don't you dare to question your parents' commands!" where his desire, his reason, his instinct for right, and his natural ingenuity for accomplishing his ends all fester together in the dark? Why not bring them all out into the light of day together and set him the task of harmonizing them? All that the adult would need to do would be to act as umpire of this game of wits and to decide if the child has succeeded.

It is true that this mental habit of considering the best reasons for doing things and of trying to make one's action fit the ideal of good behavior rather than follow a course dictated by a series of arbitrary commands is hard to acquire, but, like every other good habit, it is a sure result of practice. It can and does grow in the child after he has heard and understood a great many times the real reasons for the actions to which he is constrained, and, quite as important, from having been as seldom as possible forced to yield because someone was physically stronger than he and could beat him (if necessary) until he did yield. For it is not enough to take care that some one or two actions are reasonable or to explain the grounds underlying only one out of many decisions. The whole moral atmosphere about the child should

be permeated by a true sense of value and right proportions. Every action that is worth taking, even the most trivial, can be referred to some fundamental principle of right living, and it is a safe rule that if it cannot be so referred it is not worth enforcing upon a child. Every prohibition that is worth anything has a basis in some sound law of social equity. And again, it will be found upon honest scrutiny that any prohibition resting solely upon the prop, "Don't you do it because I tell you not to!" has a very rotten support, which will disappear as soon as the child acquires strength to knock it away.

Furthermore, the difficulty of making the child understand the fundamental laws underlying his own small actions will be very considerably lessened by the liberal exercise of that quality which should be enrolled among the seven cardinal virtues, the quality which is named according to one's native vernacular, "tact," or "ordinary horse sense." A wife who has ordinary horse sense does not choose the moment when her husband is very cold and wet and tired and hungry to ask him if he still loves her as on their wedding-day, and this is not because she doubts his love, but because life has taught her a tolerant realization of the hard tyranny which our bodies exercise over our souls. A mother who has ordinary horse sense will not choose a moment when a child is excited and tired and feverishly set upon some particular desire to expound to him for the first time the fundamental laws which prevent his having his

way. If she does, she need not be surprised that they meet with scant respect or understanding. The fact is that crises of any sort cannot be adequately coped with at the moment alone. There must have been preparation for them, begun years before, and steadily continued. The girl at high-school who is unable to summon her forces to pass an algebra examination may be paying the penalty of an early childhood without sufficient sleep. The engineer, rising triumphantly to master a great problem in bridge-building, may have begun his preparations for that feat when he was three years old and was allowed to struggle patiently with the latch of a door until he had mastered its workings. And the habit of obedience to right principles is perhaps the most arduous acquisition of wayward humanity. It needs long and patient preparation, planned with a far-seeing eye to further growth and development and practiced with due regard to the conditions of human life. One of these conditions, noted above, is that few but the most mature and philosophical human beings are able to bring all their reason to bear when their desires or their emotions are very strongly aroused. At these moments self-control will be powerful only if it rests on principles already approved by the reason in moments of calm, lucid, detached thought. A child before a showcase of candy, his eyes glistening with desire, the water fairly dribbling from the corners of his mouth, is not in a frame of mind to give an intelligent first hearing to any remarks about the

enamel of his teeth and the bad effect upon it of candy. That consideration should be already as familiar to him as the fact that water runs downhill, so that a reference to it seems irrefutable to him. He should have been forewarned of the danger and prepared for self-control by a reasonable understanding of the conditions involved, long ago, during a quiet hour, and not allowed to grapple with the idea first when all his avidly greedy little physical impulses were aroused and clamoring for indulgence.

Of course, it is hard to keep clear in the child's mind a conception of obedience unless it is clear in our own, and in the harrying, distracting confusion of everyday life with children it is hard to keep any abstract ideas clear. It is so necessary for the smooth-running of domestic life that children should "mind" that we often quite unconsciously put the emphasis on a point which in our lucid moments we do not believe to be the most important; and as carpenters use "rule-of-thumb" to save making elaborate computations in the midst of a job, it is well to have a few succinct maxims to carry one over the inevitable periods when one's capacity for reasoning is clouded by fatigue or exasperation or even (parents have been known to feel it) bad temper. One such rule-of-thumb is to remember clearly the vital difference between a real command and suggestion. Almost all of the incidents of child-life can be managed best by one form or another of suggestion, by

which a moderate amount of flexibility is allowed. Of definite commands there should be as few as possible in a child's life, based only on real necessity, and the issuing of one should imply immediate obedience. This difference between the usual suggestion and the occasional necessary command should not only be clear in the parent's mind, but should be understood by the child. As a matter of fact, whether it is clear in the parent's mind or not, the child usually learning by experience makes the distinction himself between the times when he "really *has* to mind" and those others when, even if a command has been issued, there is not really valid ground for forbidding an alternative action. But it is infinitely better to have the distinction, to have the whole idea clearly explained and admitted so that the child's judgment has sound material on which to work.

We have been supposing the modern child to live under a constitutional government. To explain fully to the child the reasons for the authority of his parents, the end to be gained by the various sorts of obedience, to have him understand that no hard-and-fast orders will be given him unless it is for the best good of his little circle or himself, all this is to expound the "constitution" of his government to him. Not long ago I overheard a young mother giving her little son a "review" of the principles of good government and an exposition of the nature and occasional need of its temporary suspension in order that

martial law might cope with unusual conditions, and yet I was sure, from the casual, unpretentious, and colloquial manner of her informal little talk, that she would have been greatly surprised to know that she had been discoursing on anything so abstract as "good government." She and her two children had been visiting neighbors of ours, and she was rather dreading the next moving, which was to the home of an elderly aunt quite unused to children. She sat with me out in the grape-arbor making buttonholes in a new dress for Harry's baby sister, while Harry played horse noisily up and down the garden path. When his breath gave out he came to sit in the arbor, kicking his heels joyfully against the legs of the rustic bench. His mother put down her sewing and looked at him with an affectionate smile. "Well, Harry," she said, "our nice visit here is 'most over. There's only a week more before Daddy will be back from his business-trip, and then we'll go home and be all together again. We've just a visit to Aunt Emeline to make before that." Harry projected himself homeward with an effort of the imagination: "I wonder if Gretchen *has* remembered to give Whiskers his milk every day! Say, has Aunt Emeline got a cat?"

"She has two cats," said his mother. "And that reminds me, I want to tell some things about our visit at Aunt Emeline's. Come over here, don't you want to, and sit in my lap while we talk?"

Thus ensconced, his head on his mother's shoulder,

Harry took part in the following little dialogue. His mother said: "Aunt Emeline is a good deal older than Daddy or Mother, and she isn't so strong as young folks and she hasn't quite the same way of doing things, so while we're there, *we*'ll have to do things a little differently. For instance, cats! Aunt Emeline loves cats, but she doesn't think it's good for them to be handled. She won't mind if you just pat them gently, but it would make her sorry you'd come if you should pick them up and hug them and love them the way we do Whiskers."

"Isn't that *funny!*" said Harry wonderingly.

"Well, it's not our way, but when we're visiting her in her house, of course we have to do things her way."

Harry seemed to see the force of this and assented thoughtfully. His mother went on: "There are lots of ways like that, that Aunt Emeline's different about. I can't think of them all now, to tell you beforehand, so we'll have to fix things this way. You know I never ask you to mind me unless there's a good reason for it?"

"Oh, yes." Harry nodded as at a well-known proposition.

"And I always try to explain the reason so you can understand it?"

Harry took this again for granted as a self-evident truth.

"And yet there are *some* times, once in a while, when the reason is too hard for you to understand

or things are so I can't stop just then to explain it to you, and you have to mind anyhow, because Mother means to do right things?"

"Like the time," said Harry, "when the lamp caught fire in the next room, and I didn't know what was the matter and you hollered to me to grab the baby and run."

"Yes," said his mother, "like that time. Or when you started to tell Mrs. Pratt about little Sister's cunning way of banging her spoon, and I told you to run away and play with Helen and I couldn't explain till after Mrs. Pratt left that her little girl-baby had died and it would make her feel so badly to hear about other babies. Well, at Aunt Emeline's house there will probably be a good many times when I can't very well explain to you the reasons for things without kind o' hurting Aunt Emeline's feelings. So you'll have to make up your mind to do what I say without understanding as much as usual the why of things. For instance, Aunt Emeline's head aches if people whistle in the house, so if you begin to whistle and I say: 'please don't whistle now, Harry,' you'll just stop, won't you, without asking why? You can save up, though, till I put you to bed, and then you can ask me all the whys at once."

Harry was apparently quite used to this experience of quiet talking-over of a situation, for he listened with a sober attention and at the end meditated for a moment in silence. Then he remarked: "I

shouldn't think little boys would have a very good time at Aunt Emeline's house."

His mother laughed. "Oh, I've just been warning you about the uncomfortable things. Just you wait till you see the size of Aunt Emeline's cookie-jar, and the raisins in the cookies." On which cheering note she dismissed him to play again. As he ran off I said curiously: "Do you have any trouble in managing Harry? His father was always so headstrong as a child."

"Oh, no!" she answered fervently. "Harry's such a good child! He must be just naturally reasonable! I shouldn't know *how* to manage a troublesome child!" But it occurred to me that very likely she was doing it every day.

In addition to a clear grasp on the difference between a suggestion and a command and to the understanding by the child of the purpose and temporary nature of "martial law" (absolute orders, issued to him only when necessary) there is another rule-of-thumb communicated to me by a wise old woman of an instinctively philosophic turn of mind. As she phrased it: "When you have to tell a child to do something, bear down hard on what you want him to do it *for!*" This not only works practically as a help in discipline, but serves the purpose of reminding, not alone the child, but the parent, of the axiom that obedience is a means to an end, never an end in itself. All but the gloomiest cynics accord to human

nature an inherent capacity to distinguish right from wrong, the reasonable and prudent from the unnecessary and trivial. The only enlightened purpose in training children is to develop this inherent capacity. To do this and at the same time to protect them from the too serious results of their mistakes many devices and tools are needed; it is sometimes even necessary to use the tool of unintelligent, enforced obedience to another human being. But this should be constantly recognized even in small details as a tool only, not as anything valuable in itself; indeed, quite the contrary, as something pernicious in itself, clumsy, ill-adapted to the purpose, and with a dangerous edge which may as easily be turned against the child's best welfare as for it. In short, a tool to be used only because we are not intelligent and resourceful enough to find better ones, and to be discarded as soon as possible. Since it is in the early years of childhood a tool easily grasped by even the clumsiest hands or the most wandering wits, it is necessary to be incessantly on our guard against it. The emphasis should be laid in every case, therefore, upon the reason for the order; and with the growth of the child's intellectual grasp on what is reasonable and right, the weight of authority should be shifted away from the personal until the child has passed insensibly with no shock and wrench of sudden transition from the baby's habit of dependence to the sane adult's habit of self-control.

The method of procedure should be, whenever possible, to issue the command or suggestion; to state clearly the end to be gained, with the reason for its desirability, and then to allow a discussion of ways and means of attaining the end. If an impartial judgment shows that ways suggested by the child will serve the purpose, he should be allowed to use them. It will be found that in blessedly many cases there will be no need to enforce upon him the abandonment of his ways, if he understands clearly that they will not accomplish the necessary action. The hearing before this domestic court should accord genuine consideration of the reasons adduced by the child and should not be a mere judicial sham to mask the high-handedness of the court-martial verdict which follows. As often as it can be contrived, the child should have the invigorating and encouraging experience of seeing whatever sensible and ingenious reasons he advances received with respect, and the verdict altered accordingly. This will not incite him to insubordination (which he soon learns defeats its own purpose), but will stimulate in him the invaluable capacity to use intelligence and ingenuity in coping, not with his parents' will, but with the underlying reasons for sensible and prudent and enlightened action.

The idea that the child is incapable of understanding these reasons no one with any acquaintance with children will advance for an instant. The child is, as a matter of fact, only too keenly sagacious

about real reasons, and penetrates only too easily the enveloping mass of disingenuous talk in which we endeavor to hide our real motives from him. Most of the "enfant terrible" comic stories are based precisely upon this appalling capacity of the fresh eye of childhood to see through the pretended to the real. At an astonishingly early age any unspoiled child can be made to understand the few fundamental laws underlying his own restricted life. One of these (perhaps the most prominent in his limited experience) is the duty of keeping in good health. This does not mean that a three-year-old child, even if he has the germ of this idea well planted in his head, can be left alone in the room with a box of candy. It means simply that any adult enforcing moderation in candy upon the child has a lever of enormous strength upon which to lean. Throughout the child's early years it means consistency and dignity on the part of the parent, later it means validity in parental authority, and finally it ought to mean that by the time the child is twelve or fourteen he is reasonably safe from excesses in the matter of food.

Take again the case of my own little girl shrinking from the dash of cold water on her chest. She is but four years old, a sensitive, high-spirited, ardent little creature, with an intense dislike of anything physically disagreeable. The nature and use of the pores in the skin, the beneficial action of cold water and brisk rubbings, the example of such practices

constantly kept up by her elders have all been laboriously and as interestingly as possible explained to her in words of one syllable. She understands clearly the use of the action intended; but [and here comes in the confusion of the mind of the cousin who cried out upon me for insisting against the child's will] all this, though excellent, does not as yet go far enough. She is but four years old and by no means mistress of her own complex organism. Her reason, although aroused and active, is not yet strong enough to make her every morning of her own accord march up to the bathroom and turn on the cold-water faucet. That is asking too much of four-year-old fortitude. But her reason is already strong enough to make her yield with no more than a momentary nervous resistance to an adult helping her to the performance of the necessary hygienic action. Because in matters where nothing vital is concerned she is allowed the free exercise of her own tastes and preferences, she does not therefore kick and scream and crawl under the bed when she is summoned to submit to something undeniably disagreeable. On the contrary, it is not even all of her that rebels against the shock of the cold water; it is only her too sensitive baby-flesh. It is not, therefore a question of child against adult, rebellion against authority. It is a question of her own will-power and self-control against her body. To achieve the desirable action the adult does not need to catch her bodily and hale her along the whole distance; he needs, so to speak, only to give her a

friendly shove along the difficult path into which her own reason has directed her.

In another family of my acquaintance the going-to-bed bugbear has been exercised in the case of each succeeding child as soon as he was old enough to understand the simple arithmetic involved. A quiet talk is started on a peaceful morning when the question of going to bed is not a burning one and the conversation runs somewhat as follows: "Now, Jack, let's decide about your bedtime. All the doctors and people who know best about how to keep well say that children of your age need at least ten and a half hours' sleep every day. If you have to be at school at nine and it takes you half an hour to get there and an hour and a half to get bathed and dressed and eat your breakfast, what time would you have to get up?" After this has been worked out, another sum is done to determine what time it is necessary to get to bed in the evening to have the right number of hours in bed. It is finally determined that if Jack starts to bed at eight o'clock in the evening he will be able to sleep the requisite length of time. No normal child who has had any experience of the use of reason can resist such a procedure, if put to him in a quiet moment, when no passions are obscuring his capacity for reason. But when night comes there is sure to be this plea: "Oh, Mother, just this once, it won't hurt me to stay up a little later; just this once!" This is the sort of thing which is usually regarded as going back

on the whole idea of reasonableness, and is put down as incipient insubordination, with no discussion allowed. But Jack's mother, having been warned by experience, made due provision even for this plea. As a matter of fact, there is some truth in it. When the doctors say a child should sleep ten or eleven or twelve hours out of the twenty-four, they do mean simply that he should sleep that long, as a general thing. They do not maintain that one night of fewer hours' rest will have any dire results. The child, using his good sense, knows this as well as you do, and the only honest treatment of him allows this, and continues as Jack's mother did: "But, of course, Jack, sitting up a little later once in a while won't do any special harm, so let's say that on one night every week you can sit up an hour later, and you can choose which night."

Then when Jack is summoned to bed (usually after a humane warning ten minutes ahead of time to soften the shock) he goes, not because Mother says so or because he is a good little boy who always minds his mother, but because he has begun to shoulder himself the responsibility put upon him by the fact of his existence, the responsibility for making the most possible of himself physically and morally.

Of course, such a system of regularity is harder on Mother than the method which consists of looking suddenly at the clock, exclaiming: "Why, I'd no idea it was so late. Jack, you must stop that and go

to bed this minute!" But the fact that she finds it hard means only that Mother is not a very good girl herself, and that she has not at all learned the lesson she is trying to teach her children, of unquestioning obedience to the right reasons for doing things.

## THE OLD AUTHORITY INEFFECTIVE

THERE are several dangers which beset anyone trying to obtain this new form of obedience from children. One is the too sanguine tendency of people who try new methods to expect too much, and to be correspondingly cast down by those occasional failures which strew the path of all human enterprises. No one need expect children to act like clockwork under any system of training, first because they are not clocks, but human beings, and secondly because there is nobody to apply systems but other human beings. And when two sets of fallible human beings come together there are bound to be clashes, no matter how ideal in theory may be the conception of their lives. Just as it is well to remind ourselves frequently that children are not little fierce wild animals to be tamed as tigers and hyenas are kept in subjection, so it is well to be careful lest we go to the other extreme in reaction and forget that they are subject to the same inherited bad tendencies, passions, and desires which cloud our own lives, and against which we must rise each day to do fresh battle. We moderns do, it is true, think that a considerable amount of the traditional "naughtiness" of children comes from bad adjustments of their lives to their needs, and that if their

surroundings were better planned there would be vastly less than the traditional friction between child and adult. But as to the need of some method of control for our children we have no more doubts than our great-grandparents, nor have we any more illusions than they about the stuff of which children are compounded. Are they not ours? How should they be perfect, even under the best surroundings we can give them?

But we later comers live in an age which has lost its faith in the ability of autocratic authority to do more than control the physical life of men, and we recognize that it is not merely the physical life of children which needs control. We differ from our great-grandparents in seeing, as they did not, the fallacy of trying to teach children to master their own defects by teaching them to allow us to master them entire. All that we hope to do is to teach them to run their own lives, not to teach them to allow us to run their lives for them. If we could only keep clearly in mind the great, the enormous, the radical difference between those two aims we could face more bravely than we do the ridicule which we must inevitably encounter from people not in sympathy with us, and the more formidable occasional times when we do not seem to be succeeding in achieving any aim at all, when we seem to ourselves to have abandoned the old and not to have attained the new.

When an autocratic old great-uncle is visiting you and the children choose that particular time to take

an unfair advantage of the rational character of their discipline and "stand and argue," as the exasperated phrase runs, with disingenuous attempts to confuse the issue, it is hard to keep one's head clear through the assault made upon one's vanity by the uncle's "I've no patience with your silly new ways of coddling children. If that were my child he'd mind me the minute I spoke or I'd know the reason why," even though we know that blustering statement to be no argument at all against the validity of our ideas. But there are other moments of real honest doubt of one's own wisdom, such as attack, I suppose, everyone not a fanatic, when the old method of imposing authority from the outside and suppressing the child's will by force seems a delightfully simple undertaking, compared to our method of teaching the child to master and direct his own will. Those are the moments against whose insidious attacks we may well defend ourselves by a few plain considerations of facts. How, after all, did the old system work? We have all seen it applied. Let us look at the spectacle with fresh eyes, forgetting the familiarity with it which dulls our vision of it. A very few honest recollections will serve to convince us that the delightful simplicity of imposing the adult will on the child's consists chiefly in the rosy haze which retrospect always casts over institutions of the past. The fact is, that while it is easy enough for a vigorous adult with a strong will to impose it bodily upon a little child, as the child

grows in strength and determination himself, this feat becomes harder and harder to accomplish. The old way out of this difficulty bore the ominous and sinister title of "breaking the child's will" and consisted in taming him as animals are tamed, by subjecting him to such violent torture of some sort that the impression of it was for all his life stamped upon his imagination. This was supposed to act as a deterrent to the free exercise of his will, even after the growth of the child had rendered impossible the actual recurrence of the pain. It had, as a matter of fact, almost invariably two results. In the case of strong characters, with the arrival of strength to equal the parents', there was a fierce reaction into insubordination for the sake of insubordination, which was luridly colored by a more or less conscious desire for revenge for the years of enforced submission. In the case of weak characters the effect was permanent, the will was really "broken," the mainspring of actions never operated freely, even after maturity was reached, and there were to be observed those curious phenomena of immaturity in adult years, which all of us have occasionally seen, still lingering on into our own days, the forty-year-old daughters who never wrote a letter without getting the approval of their mothers upon it or who never decided for themselves what hat to wear.

The truth is that, even when all conditions of surrounding society and public opinion were favorable, the old régime did not work well. There may be

"scenes" connected with the most honest efforts to make children grasp the reasons for enlightened action, but will anyone claim that there were no scenes connected with the effort to make them yield without understanding the reasons for yielding? And to any impartial observer can there be any doubt as to which variety of scene is the least painful and has in it most promise for the future of the child? Under the strictest régime of autocratic authority, in the days when autocratic authority was not discredited by society at large, there was no escape from many days of turbulence and bad feeling, many dreadful scenes of violence, many moments when "discipline" degenerated into a disgraceful hand-to-hand struggle for personal supremacy, many humiliating and embittering recollections stamped upon the child's mind, many times when the child experienced nothing but the suffocating, poisoning emotion of hatred and anger—no, our great-grandparents reclined upon no bed of roses while they enforced their ideal of obedience upon their children.

And if that was true in the time when the autocratic parent had the fullest sympathy of his contemporaries, the moral support of the opinion of his community back of him, and a fixed mental habit of his own, how much truer is it of modern parents, if in our modern life we try to cling to ancestral ideals of family relations. For no one observing the upheaval of old-established traditions of family life at present can have any illusions that the present sys-

tem, whatever it is, is working very satisfactorily. Modern parents are attempting to occupy two stools at once, with the inevitable ensuing loss of equilibrium. We say to a child, "You must mind me because I will tell you what is best to do," but if by any chance the child is able to point out something better to do or even just as good, we do not at all rejoice over this evidence of his increasing capacity to grasp the essentials of a situation. We are alarmed at the use of his brain about his own problems, and shifting our weight hastily back to the half-deserted stool of arbitrary authority, we say: "The real point is, however, my child, not that you do what is right, but that you mind me." And there ensues inevitably a certain lack of poise in the relations between children and their parents.

The only way to keep going with the system of "Do it because Mother says so" is never for an instant to allow the play of reason about what Mother says. Arbitrary authority is in its every embodiment to be accepted absolutely whole or it is refused outright. If but a single stone is removed from that imposing-looking edifice it collapses at once into a heap of rubbish. But in these days it is hard and increasingly harder to shut off the play of reason about anything. We wish our children taught to reason in school and we wish, of course, to have them reasoning beings when they are grown up, since otherwise, unless they become monks or soldiers, there is

very little place in the modern world for them. But we try to shut them off from reasoning about the one force which is ever present in their childish lives, the "reason why Mother says so." On that large blind spot we insist, always with the idea that somehow we are safeguarding the children. The particular futility of this idea lies in the fact that we insist vainly. It is an ideal that nowadays is never reached —if, indeed, it ever was. All that we accomplish is that the children shall pretend to a blind spot where in reality they see very clearly. Living in modern America, we cannot color the moral atmosphere about our children with the tradition of submission to personal authority any more than we could color the sunshine which pours upon a ten-acre lot by holding up a bit of blue glass. The very foundation of all our American institutions, the very air we breathe, is compounded equally of a fixed belief that everyone can, on the whole, run his life better than anyone else can run it for him, and of an intense reaction from the habit of reliance upon external authority. Let us not forget that this heady air of self-dependence is breathed by our children from the day of their birth. Whatever anyone may think about our American form of government, no one can say that it trains us to submit consciously to personal authority. In fact, it trains us so thoroughly not to lean on the authority of anyone, and engenders in us so violently the feeling of responsibility for our own actions, that many foreign

lovers of conventionality and old traditions find us a most unpleasant and disconcerting nation. We admit that all the manifestations of the spirit of personal independence are not lovely, but there are few of us who would not fight for the right to continue living in this breezy moral atmosphere. We breathe it in freely, we are not in the least afraid of it for ourselves, and precisely because of our deep confidence in its rightness we make, as a rule, a very poor job out of governing our children according to a régime which we would not for a moment accept ourselves. Those foreign critics have something on their side when they say that as a general thing the American child does not obey. It is true that we often have not the moral hardihood to insist that they obey an authority which we utterly cast out from our own lives. We twentieth-century people know well enough in our heart of hearts that to do anything solely "because Mother says so" is to perform an unreasonable act, and that every time a child who has attained any capacity to reason yields thus to what is made to appear to him as solely the will of another a constrictive bandage about his reason has been tightened, and the possibility for healthy growth has been lessened. But we are not willing, often we do not dare, to throw overboard this antiquated formula of "Do it because Father says you must" because we do not see any other to take its place. And yet, because our faith in it is not whole-hearted, we are often inconsistent and halting

in its application. It is true, as we are often told, that on the subject of obedience we are generally lacking in steadiness and that very often our self-willed children solve the problem for us by simply doing as they please. So true is this that as I have been elaborating in the preceding pages my protests against the doctrine of autocratic authority, I have heard a chorus of American parents crying out: "Ours an autocratic authority! We have *no* authority over our children! Do you exhort us not to repress our children? We cannot repress them enough to keep them out of harm's way! Public opinion, our own self-respect, no longer allows us to beat them into temporary submissiveness and as a result we have no submission from them."

It seems to me that what is needed is a thoroughgoing revision of our innermost convictions on the matter, for, after all, it is innermost convictions which rule the world. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, nothing shall be impossible unto you." We uneasy, troubled, modern parents are in an ambiguous situation. Modern thought beats upon us so insistently that, whether we acknowledge it or not, in the heart of every one of us lurks a doubt as to our real right to obtain the old variety of submissiveness from the children. This is shown by the complete abandonment of the more severe of the old methods of obtaining it. We do not believe in it enough to beat and starve the children into it, as conscientious parents used to, and yet we are

in a panic at the idea of really turning our backs upon it. Added to this suspicion as to the rights of our position is the additional difficulty that even if we wholly believed in it, we would almost certainly fail in imposing it upon modern children. We couldn't if we would, and we are not at all sure that we would if we could. It is not surprising that our position lacks coherence, and that, wasting our strength in clinging feebly to the old authority which is being wrested away from us, we do not succeed in establishing very much of any sort of authority in the lives of our children. We are in that fatal position of not having the courage of our convictions. We feel that the responsibility for the care of the children is a tremendous, almost a crushing one, and we need to brace us some correspondingly tremendous belief, which is supplied (if we will but wholeheartedly embrace it) by the belief in our desire to do whatever is best for them. But we insist upon mixing with that noble desire a hankering after personal dignity, which has nothing to do with anything, and a faint-hearted fear that an abstract principle, even the noblest, is, after all, a very weak weapon with which to face life; whereas human experience shows it to be far the strongest weapon anyone can have, against which mere force is powerless. We are not quite willing, and we do not quite dare, to renounce as we do the devil and all his works, the idea that the children ought to submit themselves to us, and not through us, to the principles of

righteousness and order. The difference between these two attitudes does not seem as deeply-cutting as it is. It is only in moments of rare insight that we see that the two attitudes are diametrically opposed to each other. In our ordinary, slipshod, hasty, everyday thinking the difference seems rather a theoretical one, to argue about rather than to live by, to read in a book rather than to apply when little Eleanor wants an extra piece of cake after dinner. And yet it is only when one's inner life is coherent that one's outer life is secure from inconsistencies. Is it not possible that in a thorough mastery of that fundamental difference between obedience to a personal command and obedience to an eternal law lies our only chance to attain consistency, validity, and, as far as that goes, even dignity in our authority over our modern children?

It was not easy for our great-grandmothers to control the children by whipping them. If they were made of sturdy stuff they hovered as near the edge of rebellion as they dared and stepped over as frequently as conditions removed the actual presence of the restraining authority. It is not easy for us to control the children by trying to make them exercise their reason and their instinctive feeling for the difference between right and wrong. But every time we do succeed we have done something worth doing. At the very worst, we are having no harder a time to maintain our ideas than did our forebears (consult any really candid old man or any honest old novel

on the subject of the clockwork behavior of children under the rule of autocracy) and we have the satisfaction of knowing that our efforts are directed towards a permanent, enlightened, and elevated achievement.

## ONE KEY FOR ALL LOCKS

I WATCHED a little incident the other day which, upon consideration, seemed to me a neatly-pointed satire upon the methods which I (and all parents) not infrequently use in regard to the employment of obedience. I chanced to arrive at the apartment of a friend a little early for my appointment with her, and the elevator man, showing a bunch of keys, said she was still out and had asked him to open the door for me when I came. We went up together and the man began operations on the lock, thrusting one of the keys into the hole and turning it with vigor. The door refused to open. "You haven't the right key," I suggested in perhaps an unnecessarily cocksure tone. The man looked irritated. "Yes it is," he said, still struggling to turn it. "She showed me which one. It's the right key all right." He took it out, turned it upside-down, made a futile attempt to insert it into the hole, turned it back again, and stuck it in with an ugly look of obstinate determination, turning it hard with all his strength. I had the unwisdom to insist. "Oh, I'm *sure* you haven't the right key." I was afraid he would break it off out of sheer temper. He gave me a black look and said: "I guess I know which one she told me." To my relief the superintendent of the building

chanced along and took charge of the operation. I was struck by the difference of his attack. Swiftly, deftly, he tried each key in succession, pressing it lightly to the right, and instantly desisting as he encountered the dead, unyielding resistance of metal upon metal. In a moment the door opened smoothly. He handed me the keys, nodded, and passed on, evidently dismissing the trivial and very familiar episode from his mind. But as I sat waiting for my friend it occurred to me that in my relations with children I frequently resembled the elevator man struggling, with a sour, grim determination, to unlock the door with the particular key which I had made up my mind was the right one. When any problem comes up the paternal instinct is so often to brandish authority and solve all difficulties by the use of the children's obedience. In so doing we must often force open doors and forever injure locks which might have yielded without resistance if another key had been tried. There are so many aspects to life, childish life as well as adult, there is such a richness of variety in motive and impulses, that we show a great barrenness of imagination by insisting upon treating everything by the application of one corrective. When the children arrive at the stage where it is very hard for them to restrain their purely muscular motor impulses, why not adapt our methods of necessary restraint to that particular condition and not simply stretch the children on the Procrustean bed of the necessity to obey. For instance,

when they come to the phase (through which every child passes) where it is almost impossible for them to have scissors in their hands and not cut something, why attack that difficulty solely through the enforcement of obedience? Why not remove temptation from them positively by giving them plenty of paper and rags to cut when they are seen to have scissors in their hands, and negatively by hanging the scissors out of reach? In such a short time, often only a few months, their rapid, normal growth in strength and poise will have carried them safely past this babyish weakness forever, that it seems a pity to embitter those months with unavailing attempts to force them to resist a temptation with which as yet they are simply physically not able to cope. In a prayer which we constantly use with a humble sense of our own weakness we entreat that we may not be led into temptation. We might do well to remember that supplication in our plans for the children's lives. In addition to exacting obedience from them we might try to make the occasions when obedience is extremely difficult as few as possible. We might in every way make more of an effort during the years of their immaturity not to lead them into temptations which try their undeveloped strength too hardly. The other day I happened to take to a big modern department-store a little country girl brought up in a remote valley among our little-visited mountain country. As I walked about shopping I was struck by the strange change in the child's demeanor. In

her own home I had observed her, radiant, rosy, fairly thrilling to the eye with the joy of life. She now clung to my hand in an agitated silence, observing all the multifarious objects artfully displayed about us with quick, attentive, troubled eyes. "Don't you like it, dear?" I asked her finally. She flung out her little hand with a passionate gesture. "It makes me want so much things!" she cried in a broken, unhappy voice of covetousness. We ourselves must struggle with what temptations fall in our way as best we can and only pray to be spared those beyond our power to resist; but, since the ordering of our children's lives is to a considerable extent within our power, why should we not try to shield them from unnecessarily hard trials of their strength, rather than to call upon the principle of submission to us to make up for our lack of forethought? One of the commands which it is hardest for little children to obey is the order, "Do keep quiet!" "Don't make so much noise!" Knowing this to be especially hard for them, why should we not endeavor to plan their lives so that they shall not encounter this great difficulty more than is really necessary during their early years, rather than having it as a constant subject of friction between us and them. And in the matter of good things to eat and drink, which exercise such an almost irresistible sway over children (still to a great extent little animals), why not avoid leading them into too frequent and too poignant temptation by dangling before their eyes the glit-

tering bait which we may, but they must not, swallow?

We parents must frequently seem to impartial outsiders like monomaniacs with but one idea in our heads, the frantic fear that we may be disobeyed. We not only force and smash and break open all locks by using the same key, but we insist upon applying it to doors which do not need opening in the least. To have the children obey when it is necessary to obey is not enough; we become so obsessed with the idea of authority and submission that we must needs be after them every moment, wringing obedience from them on matters which are of no importance, however they are decided. Here is a dialogue which I heard with my own ears. A mother came up a park path towards a children's sand-pile, leading her little girl by the hand. The child had a doll, which she began to put to sleep on the bench on which her mother found a seat. The mother said: "Ellen, you'd better go and play in the sand-pile."

Ellen said: "No, I don't want to. I want to put my dolly to sleep."

Her mother said, more insistently: "I *said* for you to go and play in the sand-pile."

Ellen replied, with an increase in forcible emphasis on her own part: "I don't like sand-piles. I want to put my dolly to sleep."

Her mother said: "*Ellen*, did you hear me say you are to go and play in the sand-pile? You mind your mother or you'll get spanked!"

The singular part about this story is that of the large crowd of mothers and nurses gathered about the sand-pile, all of whom heard the dialogue, not one was surprised. Not a head was turned, not an eyebrow raised. It was simply a mother, like all the rest of us, "maintaining discipline" by multiplying as much as possible the occasions when her will and the will of the child came into collision. The precise opposite of this policy is the one advocated by all the educators of genius and by those occasional women who have a genius for arranging life sanely. My mother has told me that she was aware that she was much criticised during her children's early years for her "weakness" in dealing with them. Although she never in her life read a word of Rousseau, her method almost exactly coincided with his theory. By the exercise of ingenuity, good humor, forethought, and a wise margin of flexibility she tried, in her own phrase, to "get around" the question of obedience, and as much as possible to avoid coming to frequent issues on the matter as long as the children were too small to be reasonable. Whenever it was really necessary, the strictest obedience was enforced; but in most matters her children's lives, like all healthfully varied lives, were not colored at all by the question of either obedience or disobedience. It is amusingly illustrative of the insistence of the human mind upon a preconceived idea that everybody thought it "strange" and "unexpected" that her children should obey her willingly. It occurred to nobody

that her escape from the distressing years of friction which fall to many mothers could mean that her method had any element of sanity in it.

With the knowledge of child physiology and psychology which trained minds are more than willing to impart to us, we modern parents should have a ringful of keys to use in the various problems of child training. We show ourselves singularly medieval in clinging so obstinately to the old idea of obedience as the cure-all for every situation.

It may be that the child who insists upon spoiling his clean clothes by playing with an oily lump of putty does not need to be spanked and put to bed for disobedience so much as given an apron and a big chunk of modeling-clay to handle.

It may be that the little girls who whine and speak fretfully do not so much need to "be brought up with a round turn and made to mind" as to be given more beefsteak and eggs in their diet.

It is possible that the rapidly growing boy who is slouching and awkward does not so much need to obey the spasmodic command, "Do stand up straight!" issued whenever the parent happens to think of it, as he needs a systematic course in gymnastics.

It is conceivable that the high-school girl who is "unruly" and disobeys parental commands to come home at once after school and to "keep off the streets" needs, instead of exhortations to submission, a number of innocent outlets to her desire for

gayety and fun: to be allowed to bring her friends home with her, for example; to be taken to the theater; to go on walks with her mother.

The jangling of many keys is in our ears. These are twentieth-century days. Let us take heed how we force locks, rather than open them.

## KENNETH AND HIS MOTHER

I SHOULD like to end this inadequate but honest attempt to treat a great theme by reporting just as it happened a small episode which I saw on a landing-wharf at one of our pretty inland lakes a few years ago. While waiting for the daily steamer to arrive and carry me on to the nearest railway station I was chatting with a chance acquaintance, a wholesomely athletic-looking, well-dressed, youngish-middle-aged woman, who had brought her bag of golf clubs and her youngest boy down to the pier to meet her husband coming up from the city. The child, a thoughtful-looking, large boy of six, was happily engaged in running up and down the other side of the wide pier, towing after him in the water a toy boat tied to a string. After a time his mother noticed how near to the edge he was, gave a start, and called out: "Oh, Kenneth, come here!" Kenneth looked around surprised, and hesitated about the disposition of his precious boat. His mother prescribed his course for him in detail. "Pull your boat right up out of the water, dear, and bring it here." Kenneth obeyed, his face a study of anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty as he approached his mother. She laid her hand on his shoulder and said in a pleasant voice: "I don't want you to play in the water, dear. Just stand right here near Mother till Daddy's steamer comes in."

Kenneth's face changed tragically into horrified astonishment and grief. "But, Mamma——" he began in a voice of vehement protest.

His mother laid a well-manicured hand gently over his mouth. "No teasing, Kenneth. You know Mother never allows you to tease."

Above this extempore gag Kenneth's big eyes blazed furiously. He tore her hand away and began again, struggling hysterically to speak before she could stop him: "But, Mamma, the water there——"

At the sight and touch of the child's sudden burst of violence his mother flared up into a responsive heat. "KENNETH!" she cried threateningly in the awful tone one uses to quell an unruly dog. She did not, as a matter of fact, lay a finger upon him, but that tone was ominously resonant with the reminder to Kenneth that she could, if she thought best, inflict any humiliation, any pain upon him. His face glared whitely up at her for an instant. He looked startingly to me like a little trapped wild animal, turning in a last frenzy of despair upon its gigantic pursuer. His mother's face set like flint. During the moment in which they confronted each other, the question at issue between them was quite nakedly the old, old question of the Stone Age, the question of personal supremacy. For a whole moment Kenneth held his own, stiffened into unnatural strength by the extremity of his emotion. But he was, after all, but six years old and knew himself to be quite without recourse or possibility of appeal in

the hands of his mother. His fierce little attempt at self-defense crumpled. He hid his face in the crook of his elbow and began to cry wildly.

His mother drew a long breath of relief, as at a danger passed, and turned to me: "If you never let them get ahead of you, you never have any trouble with them," she said quite audibly, "but you *must* always be on your guard and never let the first hint of disobedience pass by." After this statement of her creed we tried to return to the conventionalities and to chat of the trivialities which were occupying us before the incident occurred, but the raging sobs which proceeded from the little figure of crushed rebellion were hardly an enlivening accompaniment to small-talk. "Oh, dear! Aren't children unreasonable!" said his mother to me with a note half of exasperation, half of honest regret. "All you want to do is to take care of them and keep them from drowning and then they make it so hard for you!" After a time of uneasy silence she roused herself with an effort as to another hard task, and said gently to the child, whose paroxysm of tears had now subsided to spasmodic heavings and sighs: "Kenneth, dear, do you know you were rude to Mother just now? You struck my hand." She held up a white, shapely hand, pointing to a quite invisible mark upon it. "You know Mother never allows you to strike at anybody. Tell Mother you're sorry you did it."

Kenneth drew away shiveringly from his mother's

caressing hand and shook his head, still hidden in his arm. His mother went on voicing her request in ingeniously varied forms: "I know my little boy is sorry he was naughty. *Tell* Mother you're sorry, dear. You didn't mean to hurt Mother, did you? I know you didn't mean to hurt your own Mother. Just say you didn't mean to, Kenneth."

Kenneth shrank away further from his mother's touch and shook his bowed head obstinately.

His mother looked pained and sorrowful, and began again coaxingly: "Kenneth, darling! It's nothing hard to do; just say a few words—just say you're——"

I arose hastily and walked to the other side of the pier, finding the little scene intolerably painful. And as I leaned over the railing, trying to shut my ears to the steady urging murmur back of me, I noticed something that electrified me. I knew now what Kenneth had been trying to say. The beach ran up rapidly under the wide pier and the water where Kenneth had been playing with his boat was the merest film over the sand. Rejoicing greatly, I turned hastily back with this good news, but it occurred to me that to tell it was a pleasure which really belonged to the child's mother. I scribbled on the edge of the newspaper I held, "The water is deep only on our side of the pier. Where your little boy was playing it is not more than four inches deep," and dropped it in her lap. I could hardly wait for her to read it, and with an inexpressible pleasure I

savored in advance the sweetness of what was to follow, the misunderstanding cleared up, the child restored to his innocent pleasure, and reconciled with his mother. What happened was this: She read my message in silence and handed it back to me with a gentle shake of her head. "I never allow anything to interfere with the discipline of my children," she explained, veiling her meaning from the child by a careful choice of big words. "Any mother with experience knows that it is absolutely *fatal* to reverse a decision. The question is one of discipline now. Children must learn that when Mother says a thing——"

She turned again to Kenneth, now sunk down upon the pier in a limp heap of misery. "Come, Kenneth, dear, tell Mother you're sorry," she insisted, adding: "If you don't, dear, I'm afraid that I can't let you stay down and meet Daddy. Daddy doesn't want naughty boys to meet him."

At this threat, which apparently cut deep into the quick of an immense desire, Kenneth looked up for the first time, showing a pale, tear-stained face, fairly ravaged with anger and revolt. He bore not the slightest resemblance to the child who only a few moments before had been cheerfully trotting up and down in the sunshine, watching his boat dance over the shallows. His mother saw that she had chanced upon a powerful screw and turned it hard to induce the child to do what she could not conceive of doing herself, to admit having been in the wrong. "No,

dear, you can't stay here to wave your handkerchief at Daddy when he leans over the rail to look for you unless you'll say you're sorry for hurting Mother." As he hesitated, torn visibly by the violence of his desire to stay, she threw all her personality into her persuasion (it sounded oddly like teasing to me): "Kenneth, dear, what *makes* you so obstinate? Say it to please Mother! Just say you're sorry! Just nod your head!"

Kenneth looked into her pleading eyes with a hard expression and, jumping to his feet, ran madly down the pier and along the shore road. His mother turned to me sadly: "Why *will* children be so naughty and make such scenes? Poor little Kenneth! He wants his way so! It's so hard for him to be good!" She added: "I know just what he'll do. He'll go home and fling himself down on his bed and sulk till dinner-time. Well, it *is* hard on him to miss his father. He adores him so. I'll stop on the way home and buy him some candy."

I make no comment upon this story, reproduced from life with a photographic accuracy which I defy any reader to impugn. I hope that no comment is necessary. Kenneth touched my life only during that brief half-hour. I have never seen him since he ran wildly away. But to his memory I dedicate the above attempt to do a little clear thinking on a problem which greatly concerns his welfare.

# THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT FOR MOTHERS

"To see the object as in itself it really is."

## OBSERVATION

THERE are a number of questions in the world of thought which are everlastingly being settled by wise men in council and then bobbing up afterwards, quite as interrogatory as before. Some of these, like the Table of Elements in Chemistry and the Resistance of Materials in Engineering, concern most of us unlettered people scarcely at all. But there is one which remains perhaps more of a question than any other, the question of the relative importance of heredity and environment, and that affects us in every paternal act and judgment. The insoluble riddle of free-will and predestination which addled the brains and embittered the lives of our theological-minded forebears is rather out of fashion now, but we do lose our breath as we try to keep up with the latest news of the varying fortunes of the war of specialists as to whether people are born so or are made so by what happens to them after birth.

Of course, although there is not a class of people in existence more vitally affected by this subject than parents, it would be presumptuous for us to take a hand in the discussion. We are so busy feeding the children, bathing, dressing, and playing with them; so busy with trying somehow to bring them up, that we have no time to go off to laboratories or

to spend long months in experimental psychologizing. We must stay on our job and somehow muddle through. But though we may not hope to help solve the question to the satisfaction of specialists, we may, if we will, get a great deal of help from them in unraveling that tangled end of it which practically affects our paternal efficiency. Without stirring a step from home or lifting our eyes for an instant from the urgent needs of the present clamoring younger generation, we can import into our lives an enlightening, elucidating factor which is more important to the specialist than all his array of test-tubes and vacuums, a factor without which Mendel and Darwin would have made no headway. This factor is the "scientific spirit."

Learned men make such a to-do about the importance of this spirit, about the revolution accomplished by it in the world of thought, and about the prostrate reverence felt towards it by the greatest scientists, that most of us have not ventured to assume that we might turn it to account in our own problems. And yet it is not really so esoteric an affair. If you can corner an honest and clear-headed scientist and get him to forego big words, you will find that the scientific spirit is nothing more or less than the habit of thoroughly examining the facts of a case before you begin to theorize about them; and then basing your conclusions solely on the facts as they are and not on your prejudice. It is true that your scientist will be very likely to tell you that this

is not so simple as it sounds, and that only the highest type of mind can learn to suspend judgment until sufficient data are gathered on which to form an intelligent opinion. There is apparently in the human brain the most deeply-rooted desire to have a theory at all costs, be the facts what they may. The whole function of the scientific spirit is to combat this tendency, whether in a bacteriologist who is longing to find confirmation of his pet notion about the nature of a germ, or in a parent who insists on believing that his son is born to be a diplomat, when any chance observer can see that the boy's chances of happiness and usefulness would be infinitely greater as a scientific farmer. Indeed, though this spirit of open-minded attention to the actual facts of a case is important to bacteriologists, it is perhaps more so to mothers and fathers. Yet there is no class which uses it less. In the first place, we are more or less obsessed, modern though we may be, by the sentimental, romantic-school notion that it is somehow not quite "nice" to try to see clearly where the affections are concerned, and that a certain amount of foggy obscurity about the objects of one's love is more decorous than clear-sighted affection. But even though we may have cast off this queer old conception, it is very hard to see the children as they are or even to make much of an effort to stand off and get a conception of their character as a whole. They are so close to us for good and ill, we love them so intensely, they exasperate us so, they make

up so utterly the happiness and discomfort of our lives, that it is almost as hard to know what sort of human beings they are as to make a guess as to what sort we are ourselves; and yet that knowledge in either case is essential to intelligent action. And the most rudimentary acquaintance with the procedure of scientists shows us that the only way to acquire knowledge about any given phenomenon is to observe it, to observe it with all one's might and main and eye and sense and capacity for logic. The plant-specialist spends a year or more observing minutely the habits of a new radish imported from China before he ventures to expect any sure results in handling it. The bacteriologist keeps his eye glued to the microscope over the culture of his particular microbe for hours on end, devoting every atom of his energy to mere devout concentration on what happens. The entomologist studies with a gravity highly entertaining to outsiders every preference, every capacity of the insect he is observing. The parent has an object of research very much livelier than a radish, more complicated than a microbe, and with a vastly greater range of capacities than any insect.

Do we parents, as a rule, make any definite efforts to see what sort of children we have before we begin to try to influence them? Do we, laying aside personal feelings and preferences, try whole-heartedly to see what possibilities have been passed on to them from their very mixed ancestry? Do we face hon-

estly the facts of the case, which are that we are presented with a brand-new human being, different from every other human being who has ever lived, and that our job is somehow to guess at the treatment which will be best for him? As a rule, we do not. We have, most of us, a preconceived idea of what a "nice child" should be, an ideal which we compose of all those desirable qualities which happen to appeal to our personal tastes, and from which are absent all those undesirable qualities which chance to be especially disagreeable to us. If we are big, hearty, athletic people, as many parents nowadays are, our ideal is strongly colored with big, hearty, athletic qualities. "Anything," we say to Destiny, "so long as the children are fearless, healthy, and full of vigor! We won't mind their being noisy and obstreperous, if only they are daring and strong."

If we are quiet, studious people, fond of reading and music and gardening, our ideal child sits in our imagination rapt in a book of poetry or playing on the piano or delving happily in a bed of roses. "Anything," we say to Fate, "so long as the children have a taste for the finer, eternal things of the spirit. We won't ask them to be money-makers or to be presidents of their class in college, if they will only learn the comfort and satisfaction that lie in books and music."

Both varieties of parents have naïvely announced to Destiny that they will be perfectly satisfied if she

will give them exactly the sort of children they want. And Destiny is very apt to return her usual whimsical answer to ultimatums about what people want and do not want, and to reply that they can want what they have or get along without. For the human race is a very mixed affair, and, though the children of Chinese parents are always Chinese and the children of Caucasians are always Caucasians, the children of athletic, sociable, forceful people are by no means always of that variety; and the children of studious, quiet people are as apt as not to have pronounced tastes for bright colors in dress, for high speed in automobiles, and for the lively expenditure of the money which they competently amass.

We parents may never be specialists in the study of heredity and environment, but none of us, observing the children we really have, can claim that they are ours alone. We cannot fail to see that they belong to our grandfathers and great-grandfathers as well as to us; and though we may not be able to follow all the delicate qualifications of scientific opinions about the relative importance of environment and inherited tendencies, most of us who have had the opportunity to observe the growth and development of children have come to the practical conclusion that training, if it is to be successful, must follow the lines of deeply ingrained native tendencies. We only waste good material if we try to whittle a round peg to fit a square hole. The thing to do is to try to find a round hole which it will fit. We merely

waste time when we try to induce the child by hook or by crook to produce what is not in him.

Therefore, perhaps the very most pressing of all parental duties is the endeavor to know what *is* in the child. There is, alas! no very accurate way of finding this out, and we might as well resign ourselves in the beginning to making a good many mistakes in our guesses at it; but it is certain that the only way to have any idea at all is to follow the scientist's procedure of habitual observation carried on by clear eyes and directed by lucid desire to attain the truth lying back of the facts observed.

Most of us can testify ruefully that this is not in the least the usual parental procedure. We are very apt to snatch up a few personal preferences as to the kind of children we have always liked, to shut our eyes to the material we actually have, and to go it blind with much energy, ordaining that Margery must be taught the piano because it is nice for girls to know how to play, that Harry's over-confidence must be scourged out of him because we have always detested a bumptious man, and that Polly's shyness must suffer daily direct attacks because nowadays a girl is nobody unless she is a "good mixer."

And thus we set to work on our home garden-plot with nothing but general ideas of what is desirable from a horticultural standpoint; our ideas may be sound enough as average abstractions, but still have nothing to do with the particular seedlings which chance has given us to care for. We try to pull our

slow-growing little oak-trees up into the long, graceful, quickly-attained lines of the woodbine, and we try by assiduously pinching off every tendril and runner to give our woodbines the sturdy strength of young oaks. We try to graft grapes upon pine-trees and to produce pine-cones from pea-vines. Such is the astonishing persistence of Nature that in spite of us our pine-trees usually grow tall and stately and produce pine-cones (perhaps not so many as if we had not tried to make them roses), our pea-vines reach out desperately, cling to any chance support, and produce peas (perhaps not so succulent as if we had supplied the right support from the beginning), and our children usually grow up to be useful and happy citizens of the State, though with great frequency citizens entirely different from the type we selected for them. And we? According to our temperaments, we exclaim over the utter unaccountability of the vegetable kingdom or we take great credit to ourselves for the fine plants we have grown or we look back quizzically at the deluded self-importance of the years of our bustling here and there in the garden.

If we smile it is not, dear knows, because there was no need for the right kind of pruning and cutting and grafting; we mingle tears with our laughter over the time wasted in useless efforts to frustrate the nature of things. It is true that a pea-vine will never produce pine-cones, no matter how ingeniously the gardener labors, but neither will it produce peas

to any appreciable amount unless the gardener labors wisely. What we are called upon to do is to help each plant, each child, to grow into the most perfect specimen possible of that type of creature to which he belongs, and not to try to turn him into another type. We need not let natural inclinations run wild. The shy, studious boy needs stimulation to be social and active because his health and character will suffer if he becomes too one-sided; but there is no use in trying to turn him into a bluff, hearty, hail-fellow-well-met. It is very much better to try to make a chemist or a mathematician out of him than a soldier or a business-man who must know how to handle men. The loud, self-assertive girl needs training in gentleness and refinement because she will be insufferable if her main characteristics are not tempered by good taste; but it is a hideous waste of good material to try to chasten out of her the self-confidence which should, if properly directed, carry her through many great and fine enterprises, simply because one's personal tastes lean to the low-voiced, tranquil-browed, self-effacing lady.

The real difficulty is always to determine the type of creature to which our children belong. And yet, if we cannot, who can? Nobody has such an opportunity to observe our children as we who have seen them hourly and daily from their birth up. Whose fault is it that we have so often a totally wrong impression of them?

The greatest specialist in the world can make a

correct diagnosis only on a basis of complete information as to the facts, and in the usual case of the usual human child, the only person who is in a position to have complete information about the facts is the mother. Hence the urgent need for her to train herself to observe the facts, all of them, without prejudice, clearly, and in their entirety; in other words, to possess and be possessed by the scientific spirit.

This does not mean test-tubes in laboratories or the reading of many heavy books or long years of professional training (although, of course, the knowledge of some broad general principles of education and philosophy is a great help in interpreting facts). It means an open mind, a clear eye, sound judgment, logic, a good temper, and, most important, a full realization that we American mothers of the middle classes who care for our own children have, through this close contact with them, the most enormous advantage over even the wisest and deepest of specialists in "child-training." Every action of the child at every age (provided that it is a spontaneous action) is, to understanding eyes, a shadowing-forth of the child's character and possibilities, and as such should be scrutinized calmly and impartially by the mother. She should be ashamed that a man in a greenhouse should devote more intelligent attention to a radish-plant than she to her own children.

But this process of observation is complicated and

made more difficult by the fact that we mothers are very human, very fallible, very ill-trained, not very completely grown up ourselves in many cases; that we are called upon (lest we become too narrow and one-sided) to be wives and citizens and housekeepers as well as mothers; that we are very often tired, often discouraged, and very, very often not clear-headed—this last is the worst of all.

Take a case that has probably happened to all of us. Suppose that we are getting a meal and little Pete flies into a passion because the building of his house of blocks is interrupted by the setting of the table. We are very apt to respond by an involuntary reflex nervous reaction to his yells of rage, and to say to him with considerable justified exasperation: "Good gracious, Pete, you can't expect the family to wait dinner an hour just because you happen to be using the table for play!" and to make in our own minds the bitter reflection: "Mercy, what a temper that child has! Just like his grandfather!"

All this means that from a given fact in the child's life we have extracted two correct conclusions about his character, that he has a hot temper and that he is unreasonable (as all children are); but because we happened at the moment to be very busy and preoccupied we have missed a great many other important meanings inherent in that incident which an observer with the scientific spirit would have noted.

Perhaps we are not very much to blame for not perceiving all the significance of that little incident

at that precise moment. Preparing a meal is really a very absorbing and important task, and it is hard to have much attention left over from its processes for other facts. But what we could do, all of us, if we were willing, would be so to simplify our lives that we should have every night before going to bed a quiet half-hour of meditation, devoted to the cultivation of the scientific spirit as applied to our children.

The darning-bag or any other occupation which needs little attention is a good accompaniment to this period of reflection. Seated thus, with the children in bed, the house quiet, your own tired body at rest, go over in your mind (or if you are blessed with a home-keeping husband who takes his fatherhood seriously go over with him) the little events of the children's life that day, bringing to their interpretation all your good judgment, your sanity, and your woman's intuition. Try to *see* the facts (the only basis for your knowledge of your children) in their entirety, and not merely those sides and phases of them which affected you personally. Try to understand some of the complex instincts in the childish mind which prompted the actions of the day. Don't simply think them "nice" or "horrid," as the case may be; don't merely judge them by how they made the children "appear" to others, but try to make some sound, coherent sense out of them in the light of your previous observation. Look at what happened from all points of view.

Pete yelled and kicked because he was unreasonable and hot-tempered. Yes, that is true, but Pete's playmate, your neighbor's little boy, who is also unreasonable and quick-tempered, showed no anger, but turned away with perfect indifference from the ruined block-house and began good-naturedly to play with the cat. At the time you thought unresignedly that some people's children were a great deal easier to get along with than yours. But is there not more than appears at first sight in that difference between Pete and his playmate? Isn't it possible that Pete has ingrained in his character a dislike to give up an undertaking until he has carried it through to success? Is this theory borne out by other things you have noticed about Pete? Now that you are calm yourself, and that his exhibition of noisy temper is no longer rasping your nerves, think over the circumstances and correlate them with other facts you have noticed, and instead of being merely annoyed by them try to make sense out of them.

Do they mean, perhaps, that one of the factors in your son's character is perseverance? If so, in the quiet of that half-hour's meditation over the darning-bag you will do well to offer up a silent thanksgiving for such a lever to use in helping Pete forward to his life-work. And you may also very well have a vision of Pete no longer a passionate, uncontrolled four-year-old, but a forceful, strong, purposeful man, an engineer perhaps, building a great dam, who feels for the attempts of floods and wind

to force him from his undertaking the same resentment as that he felt towards you to-day for forcing him from his house of blocks, and who benefits mankind by turning the heat of his resentment into a great triumph over the brute forces of nature.

Yes, all of that you are entitled to foreshadow with a mother's inspired imagination out of Pete's fit of "naughtiness," and while still recognizing it for naughtiness you will no longer envy your neighbor the listless indifference of her little son. The same quality in him which now makes him yield so conveniently and good-naturedly to you will probably make him yield weakly when the flood comes, and he may make no effort to prevent his half-built dam from going down.

There is one very necessary precaution you must bear in mind in the attempt to theorize about your children from observation of them. Your observation must be disinterested and genuine. You must see what is really there and not what would fit your theories to see. Your conceptions of your children's characters must be flexible enough to be modified by developments. Anything in the world is better than an idea so fixed that you look at facts in its light rather than in the light of truth. Come to your nightly séance with the scientific spirit, bringing a perfectly fresh and open mind. One of the illuminating anecdotes told about Darwin is beneficial to remember. The great scientist was observing and experimenting on some monkeys to get con-

firmation for his theories. His son reports that his father used to say patiently nearly every day: "Well, well, those little fellows keep doing exactly what I don't want them to!" His perfectly clear perception of what they really did do, in spite of the fact that it went against the theory he hoped to establish, and his patience in changing the theory till it conformed with the facts, made Darwin the great scientist he was. It is Dr. Montessori's perfectly clear perception of what children really are which makes her the great educator she is, and it is perfectly clear observation of what her children really are which makes a good mother.

Feed your mind on the facts, seen as dispassionately as possible and constantly taken into consideration. Never try to twist them into proof of a ready-made theory. It may be that, after all, Pete is not especially persevering, but that his impatience came from a great passion for constructing things with his hands. This is a point you alone can settle, and you can settle it only by long and close observation of Pete's natural actions. And this observation of him must not be colored by the fact that he is or is not being "naughty," which usually means being inconvenient to adults. To study this out you will never have a better time than now when Pete is a little boy and has no notion of concealing his impulses. Nobody in the world, not even Pete's future wife, will ever have a better opportunity than you have right now, hence your responsibility. Before

you can help Pete to be the best there is in him, before you can help him to turn into profitable and noble channels the energy that animates him, you must know, not child-psychology in general, not philosophy, not medicine, not the nervous reactions of the brain, but Pete himself.

## ROOM TO GROW IN

I was connected for some years with a very large, fine, modern school in New York City, which drew its clientèle from the most enlightened and highly educated class of the community. The parents of the children in the school were not millionaires, but they had, as a rule, plenty of money to arrange their lives and their children's lives as they saw fit. They were not educational experts, but they were all intelligent, cultivated people, who took the most earnest and conscientious interest in their children's welfare. Their children had the best food and nothing but the best, and their accomplishments were as carefully looked out for as their diet. Beside the excellent school-program, they had music-lessons, they learned to draw, they were taken to improving matinées and Shakespearean plays, they had pretty, professional, lady-story-tellers recite fine old myths and legends to them; as soon as they were old enough they were taken to the opera after a due study of Wagnerian motifs, they acted in little historic dramas, they went to dancing-classes. Never were there children, I used to think, so favored by every improving circumstance.

One day I had occasion to ask a boy in the fifth grade, a nice little fellow of ten, to set a time when

he could make an expedition with me into the woods to gather wild-flowers. It seemed this was a new experience for him: greatly delighted at the prospect, he began to plan for the trip. He could not go that afternoon after school, he told me, because it was the day when he was taken to the Natural History Museum to look at the specimens, and after that he had his French conversation, and then it would be dinner-time. The next day was no better, for he was to have a riding-lesson and be taken to the Metropolitan Museum to look at the pictures, and the day after that was his regular German walk-and-talk, and his semi-weekly lesson on the violin. To make a long story short, and to cut through a lengthy cross-examination to the conclusion very surprising to me, we discovered that he had no free time in the afternoon in view for at least a month. This was as far into the future as time allowed us to investigate. I tried the morning with no better result. Yes, he had an hour before starting to school, but that was always taken up by his daily stint of practicing on the violin. There wasn't any other time *for* that, and Mother never allowed anything to interfere with it. Once you began to break in on it, she said, there was no stopping. The little boy seemed to find all this quite natural ("the days are pretty short, you know," he said soberly; "a person doesn't have time for much"), but as I looked at his diminutive stature and remembered the golden leisure of my own childhood's after-school

hours, I said impulsively: "Bobby, dear, when do you ever play?" Bobby's face brightened into rapture. "At *recess*-time!" he cried ardently. Recess-time, I hasten to explain, is ten minutes twice a day.

I was so startled by this revelation that I began a series of investigations into the lives of a number of the other intensively educated children in that school. I found the same conditions prevailing in them all. Down to the smallest and up to the biggest they were given everything that could conduce to their development, except time to develop. With little attention given to their powers of digestion, their little beaks were held open while one mature bird after another stuffed down their throats an endless succession of succulent worms. Some moral, mental, or esthetic pabulum was being fed them every waking moment, with no intervening time to exercise and digest what was digestible and throw off what was unsuitable, and consequently with no clear idea on the part of the guardians as to whether they were being effectively strengthened by it or not. I was not surprised to learn that in the summer they were often sent to country localities, where, under the watchful eye of expert "play-leaders," they "learned how to play." One mother, noting my interest in the phenomenon, said to me proudly: "I have the satisfaction of knowing that every moment of Eleanor's life from her babyhood on has been *profitably* employed. We have a splendid Fraulein

for her, who teaches her the irregular verbs in German while she is having her hair brushed, and her father gives her exercises in mental arithmetic while we are at breakfast."

I was reminded of a quaint old country story about a Mrs. Purdon, who has thrown all her soul into her occupation of butter-making. Summoned to watch a superb sunset, flaming through a gap in the mountains, she said: "Yes, I always do love to watch a sunset. The sun looks to me just like a great butter-ball, and I get to thinking what a satisfaction it would be if I could jam my wooden print down on it and mark it with a nice, clear P."

They were marking their suns with nice, clear P's, those competent, carefully overseeing parents, who doled out each minute of the child's life to feed some prejudice of their caste or to sink them deep in the grooves of the customary, and who left the children in which to draw a few breaths of their very own exactly ten minutes twice a day.

Now, it may seem that this sort of intensive, organized instruction is so far out of the common run of ordinary American life that most of us plain, middle-class people need no warning against it, but it may be well to examine our hearts to see if we are not as a class weakening somewhat in the old American tradition that if the children have gone to school and done what small "chores" are set them, they are entitled to whatever remains of the day? Does not the increasing complexity of our own lives

insensibly color our children's lives? Whether or not we actually do put a constricting pressure upon the children to use even the chinks and fragments of their time to acquire accomplishments which seem to us profitable, do we not feel that perhaps we ought to——? Are we not obsessed as parents as well as in other relations of life with the modern necessity to be "competent," to be "efficient" according to the latest fashions of those virtues. Our children do still escape from us into play-times of blessed spontaneity, but is this not frequently because we have not the money to live up to a mistaken ideal? If we are very "plain" people indeed, we are apt to look rather wistfully from the well-groomed, prince-like child, playing prettily with a French attendant, to our own undistinguished children, who escape from school yelling like Indians and spend every minute of the rest of the day playing and playing and playing with each other, exhibiting an energy almost alarming to witness. If we have ambitions to pass out of the ranks of "plain" people, do we not begin our imitations of our financial superiors by trying to make over our children according to their standards? We do not want our children to be without the "advantages" enjoyed by other people's children. That they might pay for these superficial accomplishments with the loss of the wonderful elasticity and wealth of forward-thrusting initiative which is their birthright is not apparent enough to alarm us.

The best educators of all the centuries may tell us that the hours spent on the playground are frequently the most profitable of the child's schooling, the fact remains that the child at play looks to us like an idling child. Many of our most precious recollections, which will endure and gild our old age, may be of the regal leisure and untrammeled freedom of our own vacations and out-of-school hours when we faced life like joyous conquerors, and in exploring the world discovered ourselves, but we hesitate to give our children the same heritage of freedom and space in which the simpler conditions of our own childhood allowed us to throw our limbs about and to discover their strength.

Information is good, accomplishments are good, parlor tricks have nothing wrong with them, but it is well known that there can be too much of a good thing, and that enough is not only as good as a feast, but far better. A surprising number of accomplishments (though, of course, not all) and an immense amount of information, to acquire which are expended long hours and days out of a child's life, can be acquired, if they are needed in maturity, by a few vigorous applications of the adult mind. If they are not needed, the time spent on them might have been better employed. Any grown person who cares to do so can learn as much of the story and philosophy of the Wagnerian operas in three hours of concentration as a child in several months of infrequent, elementary lessons. He can learn as much

of a foreign language (except the accent, which is but the ornamental part of the knowledge of a language) in three months of real application as a child in several years of enforced, disconnected instruction through "conversations." The amount of time and youthful strength wasted in the usual "music-lessons" and the pitiably small amount of musical knowledge thus acquired is notorious. It is more than possible that that time would have been better employed in playing with all the childish might and main some game requiring forethought, decision, and agility, qualities not to be secured in a hurry, by any effort of the mature intellect, but only by endless practice, the free exercise of them, and the long habit of using them.

We ought to rejoice that our generally moderate means, the detested high-cost-of-living, and the free-and-easy tradition of most American communities all combine to keep our children as yet nearer the ideal of the wisest educators than our own unenlightened choice would dare to have them, and we ought to try to see to it that their lives continue to be conducted with the fortifying simplicity which we have failed so notoriously to conserve in our own. We ought to clear our minds of the fallacy that if only the improving pellets are so well greased with pleasing details that they slip down almost unperceived by the swallowing child, he can therefore assimilate all we can get down him. We ought to stand guard over him, protecting him from the tendency of the

times to a deadly multiplicity of impression, by seeing to it that he has time between vivid impressions to absorb them and make them part of his growth. Nothing could be more blamelessly improving than an "educational" moving-picture show, but a child who is taken to one every day ends by knowing nothing of any one of them.

No, we need have no faint-hearted notion that we are not giving our children all the "advantages" they might have, if we arrange their lives with a large margin of time uninfringed upon by definite "engagements." The child not only develops himself, but discloses himself in freedom, provided always (this goes almost without saying) that this is in suitable surroundings, is set against that "right background" which is the subject of the first essay of this book. The most anxious observation will disclose nothing of an insect's tendencies if he is firmly impaled upon a pin or even if he is wrapped up ever so kindly and gently in cotton wool. The most conscientious study of a child reveals nothing of his native inherent capacities unless he is accustomed, through many experiences, to initiate action himself. In plain words, unless he is used to having time in which to do as he pleases, provided he keeps out of mischief.

# ON JOINING THE OLDER GENERATION

## THE STATE OF AGE

Rub thou thy battered lamp; nor claim nor beg
Honors from aught about thee. Light the young.
Thy form is as a dusty mantle hung,
Oh grey one! pendent on a loosened peg.
Thou art for this our life an ancient egg,
Or a tough bird; thou hast a rudderless tongue,
Which runs, Time's contrast to thy halting leg.
Nature, it is most sure, not thee admires;
*But hast thou in thy season set her fires*
*To burn from Self to Spirit through the lash,*
*Honored the sons of Earth shall hold thee high.*

—MEREDITH.

## THE DILEMMA OF THE MODERN PARENT

It does not come when one might expect it, all at once with the arrival of the first baby; it is too big and vital a thing to be conceived without much mental preparation, but so insidious and unconscious is the preparation that the final result bursts upon one with a dreadful abruptness: "Why, how is this? I am now one of the older generation!"

This clarifying self-knowledge never thrusts all its piercing reality into the hearts of any but fathers and mothers. Unmarried or childless men and women often go buoyantly on to the end of their days in a light-hearted illusion of their own youth. Every bachelor has a trace of the boy about him. No parent is young. The fact of his parenthood writes him down as irrevocably adult.

With the realization of this fact like a great clap of doom in his ears, the self-pitying parent feels a widened sympathy towards all adults. At one stroke the older generation is avenged for the arrogance of his former attitude towards it. He pities it, he understands it, he profoundly sympathizes with it as he sees himself one with it—an Ishmael, a tyrant, a pariah, an outsider in the thought of the younger generation. Well he knows from his own experience that youth is already quoting Shakespeare's too

familiar contrast between "crabbed age and youth." Well he remembers Turgenieff's bitter theory that there is no hostility in life like the instinctive hostility between the young and the old. Every poet, every philosopher has dinned in our ears the conviction that this hostility is inevitable. Ever since, as an undergraduate, he began to be wise he has repeated to himself the old aphorisms about the instinctive need of the younger generation to defend itself and its life against the older, about the inevitable opposition of their interests, about "radicals of forty trampling the life out of radicals of twenty now as ever," about the right of the young to live their life in defiance of the tradition-ridden old, about the "instinctive secrecy of the child's heart," and he has thought himself very advanced and enlightened and knowing. But now, as the little heads around his table begin to grow upward with startling rapidity, he finds that he has been whetting a two-edged sword.

If it were not touching (being a parent myself, I naturally find it pathetic) there would be something inimitably comic in the metamorphosis of the parent suddenly waking to find himself in another generation from the one in which he went to sleep. How hurriedly he turns inside out all his previous convictions; there is something to be said for the older generation's vested interests, after all, he argues; a certain respect, not to say devotion, should, after all, be paid to the mere fact of parenthood. Old heads

do think more clearly than young ones. He recognizes an inherent reasonableness for every claim which in his own youth he put aside with so impatient a hand.

Now, no object can be more fatuous than a human being trying to persuade himself that a universal law will somehow be polite enough not to apply to him. It may be that any attempt on the part of our generation to hope for a deep, endearing, far-reaching relation of love and trust between us and our children after they are grown up is to hope for something which others have not had and is as futile as a hope that the law of gravitation will not apply in our case. But, as a matter of fact, our generation has produced men who have played strange and unexpected tricks with the law of gravitation. They have not in the least annihilated it by their feats in flying, but they have offset its force by utilizing other laws of physics. And they have succeeded because they had the courage to face an old difficulty with new eyes. Why, then, should we sit down hopeless before another old difficulty, simply because it is old? Is there not a chance that by honestly admitting its existence and examining it we may be able to judge it more clearly and perhaps offset its strength by the use of other elements in human nature?

One factor in the modern world is in our favor, although it must be admitted that a bold leap of the imagination is needed to expect help from it. So-

ciety, as it wends its devious way towards its unknown destination, is leaving behind it all admiration for respect and reverence as qualities in and of themselves desirable, whether based on sound reason or not. Certainly this view is upsetting to our old illusions, but perhaps the roughness is salutary. It may be tumbling us toward the path of escape from our age-old predicament. Whether one finds this abandonment of baseless respect a good or a bad tendency depends upon one's temperament. Its existence cannot be denied. People nowadays make no apologies for asking "to be shown" before they expend any respect. Of course, in the long run, institutions, qualities, persons have always been weighed in a true scale, and have been respected or not according to their inherent worth; but the process has never been so bare to the eye as at present. The cruel justice of the proceeding has been masked in the past more than it is now by the hard-dying idea that reverence, whether it has any reason for existence or not, is in itself a beautiful quality. There is little of this idea left in the modern world for us parents to snatch up, as parents have done before us, substituting it for the lost illusion of youth. Therefore, before we sink too deeply into the ruts of middle life, we might as well make a virtue of necessity and give up voluntarily the traditional brand of skin-deep "respect" claimed for the mere accident of birth which modern life is ordaining that we shall not have in any case, whether we give it up

willingly or not. It may be, if of our own accord we abandon the attempt to wring out affection as an enforced tribute to the mere physical tie of blood, that we shall be able to obtain another sort of more spontaneous and enduring affection. It may be, if we face the situation honestly, casting aside sentimental cloaks which veil the facts of the case, that we may be able to find some really valid planks of common interests, common ideas to throw across the gulf between the generations as a beginning of the bridge of amity, which, it is to be hoped, will some day unite the two extremes of humanity in the conviction of their real solidarity. Perhaps the poets and philosophers have been wrong about the inevitable hostility of the younger to the older. Even poets and philosophers are not always infallible. Theirs may be an old unhappy superstition, which, like Pilgrim's roaring lions, will prove, if we but advance boldly upon it, to be chained fast and quite harmless. There may be under its terrifying mask of tragedy nothing more resistant to common sense and ingenuity in readjustment than there is under the equally scowling hypothesis of the inevitable hostility between the sexes. Many modern women are joyfully finding that to be but a make-believe bogie, and from out the noisy hurly-burly and riot of strange actions connected with what is known as the "feminist" movement have quietly extracted the fortifying conviction that there is no such thing as "the sex-war." May we not live to see shaken on its founda-

tions that other ugly saying that there is an impassable barrier between the younger and the older, that real confidence is impossible between them? May it not perhaps be proved, as in the case of sex, to be a question of temperament rather than age? Are we, after all, so utopian, if, realizing our perilous situation as adults, we fall with a frightened quickening of all our faculties to a desperate attempt to find a rational way out?

We may feel ourselves very enlightened and advanced as we undertake this scrutiny of a situation to which, we flatter ourselves, nobody else has ever been so keenly alive, but, as a matter of fact, nothing but the hard press of circumstance has driven us to it. We have been forced by observation of actual conditions around us to a realization that an intelligent, modern American is not a Chinaman. He will, as a matter of duty, care for, indulge, and protect, but he will not, he *cannot*, reverence or respect or even like a parent who is not admirable or likable. But even in the face of this flinty fact we feel a weak-kneed tendency to fall back on the old argument: "After all we have done for the children we have a right to expect a decent return of natural affection and deference for our opinion." That apparently solid argument, buttressed as it is with the actuality of the long years of service we give to our children, with the entire prostration of our lives before theirs in the days of their infancy and early childhood, is shaken to its foundations by their

simple reply that they did not ask to be born. That is nearly unanswerable. We can, if we choose, lay their appearance in the world, not to any conscious purpose on our part, but to a manifestation of that formidable "life force," that "élan vital," of which philosophers have been talking so much of late. And yet, shift the responsibility all we please, the practical fact remains that their existence is a result of our actions. Whether we willed it or not, the result is that we are responsible for them, not they for us. Another modern tendency throws its weight into the scale against us also. With the waning of the old belief that life, any sort of life, is the most inestimable of boons, with the keen sense that life means suffering as well as joy, which is characteristic of a certain twilight aspect of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we are less unthinkingly sure of our right to call human beings into existence, unless we take very good care that existence is well worth while. The sleepless nights and anxious days, the heart-sick watchings and vigils, the sacrifices of time and inclination, the million-times repeated acts of care and protection that are so vivid to our minds, appear to modern parents in the light of payments on a debt contracted by them when they brought their children into the world. We look back in unavailing envy upon the simpler complacence of older generations, who regarded the care given to children as a piling up of advance payments to be met by them in their maturity.

Even if we do not concede this in theory, as a matter of fact everybody knows that nothing is more futile than to attempt forcibly to extract deference for one's opinions as a return for benefits conferred. One can, by turning hard the screw of obligation, often squeeze out an appearance of deference, assumed conscientiously by the beneficiary as part payment for a debt, but in the long run the best opinions are the only ones which are respected, no matter whose they happen to be.

We have over parents in the past at least the melancholy advantage that this has been mercilessly made plain to us, that we have seen our own generation uncompromisingly repudiate this supposed obligation. As a girl I was struck, although most disagreeably, by hearing a youth of my acquaintance protest doggedly against a familiar confusion of thought on the subject. An appeal was made to him to defer on the choice of a profession to the desire of his mother, notorious in the family for her lack of good judgment. It was pointed out to him that after all the sacrifices his mother had made for him in his babyhood he should feel more respect for her opinion. He answered with an ugly bluntness: "You don't necessarily reverence the character of the man who has loaned you ten dollars, and you don't trust his taste in cigars unless his taste is good. You pay him back his ten dollars. I'll be good to Mother, of course. Why, nobody thinks more of Mother than I do, but blessed if I can see why her washing out

my nursing-bottles when I was a kid makes her ideas on the law any more important." I remember that, though I was startled by the uncomely directness of this presentation of the subject, I felt in my heart an assent to its substance. That was when I still belonged to the younger generation.

Since any clarification of a problem is a help towards solving it, we parents ought to be thankful for the plain statement made to us by the modern world, that the feeling of children towards parents is bound by the same laws which govern other human relationships. We have no excuse for not acknowledging to ourselves that while the long and intensely intimate life-in-common of child with parent does often happily produce the great affection which can only be founded on intimate knowledge, it may also, if conditions are not favorable, produce only a mild brand of tepid usage, tinctured by much irritability and friction. We have no right to shut our eyes to the fact that a radical difference of temperament between parent and child, if it is not recognized, admitted, and adjusted as between any two other human beings, results in alienation and irascibility. Is there one of us who has not in his circle of acquaintances (he is fortunate if it is not somewhere within the circle of his blood-kin) an instance of mother and grown-up daughter who are mutually incompatible and who, if they attempt to live together under the ordinary conditions of mother and

child, reduce each other to rebellious misery? The plain fact is that they are no longer "parent and child" at all. The relation of "child" to parent is, as its very words would show it, not a lifelong relation at all, but exists only while the child is a child in very truth. With us, as with the animals, the true "parental" relation ceases with the arrival at maturity of the young, and if we have not proved ourselves human beings by taking advantage of the transitory, physical relation to create another, more enduring moral tie, based on spiritual affinity, or, if that is not possible, on mutual respect, we need not be surprised if the relationship is often strained, and is never all that we might wish it. A grown-up son cannot in the nature of things be a "son" to his father in the sense of submitting his will, his judgment, or his responsibility for his own acts to his parent. They are two adult members of the same race who should be closer and dearer to each other than to anyone else, because they have behind them in common what they can never have in common with any other human being—long years spent together in the most intimate and searching of human relationships. But if those years have not really been lived together, or if the penetrating light of intimate knowledge has shown the parent to be unworthy of respect, then those two human beings have less chance for feeling a deep affection for each other than almost any other two. They have had their chance to learn to know and love each other,

and have either let it slip or have found it a vain attempt.

If I were writing for children and not for parents there would be much to say on the other side. In fact, every parent can bear witness that having children of his own floods his imagination with new light as to his relations with his own parents. Viewed from the new angle, there appear many new possibilities for a more generous spontaneity and ingenuity of effort to unite with the older generation, for a more thoroughgoing search for reasonable points of contact with one's elders, a more richly varied and imaginative view of the unity of the family. Ah, yes, now that I am a parent I have a fine new line of notions as to what children should be to their fathers and mothers. But precisely because of the instinctive rallying of parental ideas about this point, it is wholesome and tonic for parents to recall the very real limitations of their position. Those limitations are extreme. Nothing is more evident than that it is idle to call upon the spirit of mere obligation to produce anything more than its usual rather dreary results or more or less material repayment. This is not because the obligation will not be felt by our children. In most cases they will strive anxiously and conscientiously to discharge it. It is because the only coin in their possession will be more or less material. The finer, impalpable values of the spirit are beyond their

powers to control, beyond anyone's power to control.

No matter what we are, our grown-up children, if they are what is known as good children, will have an earnest desire to "be good to us," they will cultivate to its utmost extent their affection for us, they will be (according to their temperaments) more or less tolerantly lenient towards our failings (well known to them by that time), they will, blunted by long association, excuse faults in us which they would hotly resent in others because "that's always been Mother's way," and almost certainly when we become really old and infirm they will yield to the traditional pleasure of being the stronger and wiser, and cherish us with the same protecting care we showed to them in their babyhood. A survey of the different generations of the families we any of us know gives reasonable proof that this much will be ours if we merely refrain from any too outrageous aggression or exactions. But this prospect is poor comfort for those who have a desire for a deep, enduring, intimate, and far-reaching relationship as a result of the sacrifices and self-abnegations of parenthood. If it is true that our relations with our fellow-creatures make up all the riches of our lives, we have missed a great treasure if we extract from the parental relation nothing more than has been cited above. From what might have been a Golconda we have mined out a few much-alloyed nuggets which will save us from utter privation in our

extreme old age, but which shall be of little comfort to us before that time. In most cases the parent is in the prime of his middle life when the children come to maturity. It will be long before he needs to have the relation reversed and be loved as a child is loved, while being really excluded from any genuine share in the life and thought of the family. What relations of any real depth, sweetness, or intimacy may he have with his grown-up children during the score or more years when they are neither one of them a child, but both adults? That is the question which haunts modern parents. What *we* want from the children is something beyond their power to produce by a conscious effort. They cannot, simply by taking thought, have genuinely common interests with us (if our interests and ideals are really opposed) any more than they can by taking thought add cubits to their stature.

The difficulty is just the old, old one that the emotions cannot be summoned or dismissed at will. In fact, so little are they voluntary that a direct demand for them, made on the ground of duty, usually has the effect of nipping off like a frost whatever buds of promise were in the heart. It is true that affection springs up in response to love, but only if the love is not self-seeking and does not demand affection in return. The strangely constructed human heart is notoriously prone to answer the stand-and-deliver summons of "I love you, therefore it is your duty to love me" by a precipitate retreat from any-

thing approaching affection. And parents are not exempt from this law.

It seems clear, therefore, that not only is it ungracious and dangerous to demand as a right the affection and respect of grown-up children, but that any attempt to force affection and genuine respect as a return for service must defeat its own purpose.

Observation of life about us makes clear another renunciation which is forced upon us, whether we will or not, and which we would do well to accept graciously rather than struggle against sourly. We must abandon being the central figures in our children's lives. If we fight against this fate we run the risk of being practically forbidden any place at all in their lives. If we try to retain too much we run the risk of getting nothing. "Whosoever shall lose his life shall find it." For whom was that written, if not for parents? Unless they renounce voluntarily the old usurer's claim on the younger generation, they shall never receive any of the pure gold of their affection and trust.

But there is an old Adam in our hearts who must be laid low before we can bring ourselves to contemplate calmly giving up a relationship so precious, even in order to be able to attain another, which is not only precious, but immortal; and no old Adam is ever slain without battles and much pain. I felt my own rebellious heart give an assenting throb of yearning when an old countrywoman, looking down on my baby daughter, said to me with a fierce accent

of exhortation: "Take comfort in her now while you can! From the minute she's weaned she begins to travel off where you can't get at her." And it is true that the nursing mother with her baby at her breast is at the very apogee of her *physical* motherhood. Her prestige declines from that moment. Every day after that time weakens the physical tie. The sick sinking of the heart which mingles with the pride of the first moment when the little creeping quadruped stands upright and steps off—that is the old Adam to be slain. The brief burst of glory in the baby's early infancy when we are everything to him —God, Providence, Nature—we must learn to give that up in willing sacrifices, repeated every day and almost every hour, and accept with no rebellion the plainer truth that we are but human beings with him, subject to the same laws, clad in the same muddy vesture of decay, soberly endeavoring to keep alive within us the same tiny spark of eternal life.

But if we accept the law, which, after all, we cannot resist, at least there is some gain in avoiding the friction inevitable in an attempt to live contrary to it. Furthermore, our very resignation may open our eyes to other compensations. If we admit wholeheartedly that we need never expect in later life the perfect unity of mother and baby, the truth may dawn on us that such a so-called perfection of unity was more apparent than real. It seemed unity because for all practical purposes there was nobody in it but the mother. The baby's individuality did

not clash with hers because he had as yet no individuality strong enough to assert itself. The moment he begins to grow into a real human being a hundred divergencies of taste, temperament, and convictions make that old relationship impossible. And yet, if we analyze with sufficient courage the cause for much of the friction between parent and child, we will see that it comes from the unwillingness of parents, even modern parents, to give up that ideal of unity. We would do well to read that scene from the "Pretenders," where Ibsen makes King Skule ask the prophetic seer, Jatgeir the Scald, to be a son to him, and cries out: "I must have someone by me who sinks his own will utterly in mine, who believes in me unflinchingly, who will cling close to me in good hap and ill, who lives only to shed light and warmth over my life, and must die if I fall." Jatgeir answers briefly: "Buy yourself a dog, my lord."

We think we are so modern that none of this medievalism still tinges our attitude towards the children. We point (not without exasperation) to the innumerable details of material life in which the new ideas about freedom for the growth of personality have altered the tone of family life, the exuberance and unchecked noise of the younger children, the latch-keys owned by our older boys and girls, the insistence of the younger generation on wearing whatever hideous styles they choose, and on dancing steps quite different from those by which we shocked *our* elders, the light-minded way in which they choose

whatever profession they please without sanction from us. We point back to a highly imaginary portrait of youth three generations ago, with down-dropped eyes of meekness and mouth up-primmed to ask permission to breathe, and we cry out to our consciences: "Look at the enormous freedom we have given the children! What more can they expect of us?" And when we have said that we breathe more freely, having managed to confuse the whole point at issue by a plausible, inaccurate phrase. For it is not we parents in general who have given the children this enormous increase of freedom. Every step of that liberty has been forced by changing public opinion out of a groaning, unwilling, and terribly alarmed family organization. Each generation of parents has exacted less subordination of one personality to another merely because they were not able to exact more, and each generation has been firmly convinced that the world was coming to an end because it was impossible to keep up the discipline of the former age. (And be it said in parentheses each generation has seen blessedly less of that terrible rancor between father and son, which furnishes such a well-worn, convenient set of motives for the plots of the older novel-writers.) But for all this change in relation, taking place, in fact, under our noses, we still as a class shut our minds in theory to the forces underlying it; and we still suffer in most cases the most miserably hurt feelings to note how from out the dimpled, curly-headed

toddlers, whose fat hands clutch so hard about our guiding fingers, there emerge gradually a number of greatly differing individualities, entirely separate from ours, who are grown-up human beings, and nobody's children, not even ours.

Everyone has known and many of us have experienced the precious proofs that a beautiful relationship can exist between grown-up "child" and parent; but nobody, not even the greatest lover of illusion, can claim that if that relation is wholesome and natural, and does not interfere with the vigor of the younger person, it can be based on anything remotely approximating the relation of a child to an adult. We go on calling it the "filial" relationship and thereby confusing it with quite another sort of "filial relationship," which is dependent on the inequality in actual knowledge and strength of the two individualities involved; and we insist upon considering it as identical with the connection which began it, quite as the besotted Sir John Cutler darned his stockings with worsted until from silken they had become woolen, although he insisted that they were the same pair. This comparison, upon second thought, is inaccurate, is gloriously inaccurate, for what the congenial and devoted grown-up child and parent have done is to keep mending the inevitable breaks in their physical relationship with the pure silken thread of a growing spiritual affinity until, without realizing it, they have an entire new relationship made of vastly finer and more lasting stuff

than that out of which their first was fashioned. And that shining goal, unconsciously reached in some cases by a chance happy combination of agreeing temperaments, is the one which gleams before our eyes as we look for the way out. What we may hope is that if we bend all our faculties to that end, as the relation of physical parent to physical child weakens and dies, the relation of spiritual parenthood may slowly emerge.

The great word is out. Try as we may to bring ourselves to let the children go, when they are no longer children we cannot do it. We have a wistful hope, as all the generations of men before us have had, that we may make provision against the loneliness of old age by rearing children. We have the same old feeling, deep in our hearts, that somehow the immense love we bear them should keep them near us during all of life, and not merely during their immaturity. Yes, all the disallowed claims of the older generation, having been put violently out of the door of modern life, have returned through the window. But the maker of that old proverb did not allow for the chastening effect of a temporary enforced sojourn out-of-doors. It is true that we younger ones of the older generation feel a sudden conviction that there is more foundation for the claims of parents than we had thought before, but we have been frightened by our own reasoning and the civilization of our own time into a searching inquiry into the grounds on which they rest. We have

seen that physically the children do really very soon reach our sides and pass beyond us, and that any pretension to influence them which rests its remotest corner upon the argument of physical superiority or on the mere brute fact of longer years is of the most ephemeral and transitory nature; and we have seen that their relations to us are embittered and obscured by our clinging to this pretension after its foundations have disappeared.

## THE USE OF INSIGHT

VERY well then, here we are, chastened and subdued as befits parents at this stage of the world's history, at last with a clear idea of our own limitations and with a vividly imagined goal before us. We have seen that we are the children's physical parents only so long as they are physically children, and if we are to continue to be useful and welcome factors in their lives, it will be only because we have succeeded in substituting for that quite impermanent tie the strong and lasting one of a spiritual bond; and we have seen that to try to use physical repression of any sort as a means to that end is worse than useless.

And yet to go to the other extreme and abandon all attempt at any sort of influence over the children is as fatal to our purpose of growing into a permanent and valuable relationship with them. The least observation of family life about us will deter us from contemplating the adoption of that short-cut method of child-training which in older days was frankly and picturesquely called "spoiling the children," and which still exists masked under various fine new names like "Nietzscheism," the "development of the superman," or "the right of the ego to expand without limitations." Nobody who has ever encountered a child who has undergone this system of "hands off"

has any illusions about the sort of child produced by the simple method of letting him do what he wishes at all times. We are modern; we believe (at least we are beginning to believe) in the right of each individuality to develop as freely as possible without interfering with the rights of others, but a spoiled child is a spoiled child, no matter what he is called. There is notoriously no hope for anyone, let alone their parents, to keep in close touch with people who have had all their whims gratified.

We are forced to see, therefore, that we cannot adopt abdication, that traditional alternative to tyranny. We cannot make "the great refusal" and expect to come off with the least credit. We must neither repress the individuality of our children nor let it run wild. Those are the conditions of our undertaking. The question now is one of ways and means. How shall we, confronted with myriad-headed reality, set about our great enterprise?

Well, to begin with, we can mentally remove ourselves for a while from our usual intense personal interest in that fascinating and exciting drama called domestic life, and look at it critically from a little distance, as an intelligent stage-manager goes up into the top gallery to see if the mass grouping of his actors is correct. If we discover (as we nearly always do) that physical and material matters are usurping the center of the stage, instead of occupying the modest minor position in the wings which really belongs to them, we can rush again to

the stage and endeavor to rearrange matters more reasonably. It is a never-ending struggle, and it seems like a new one every day, because we are dealing, in children, with organisms endowed with an immense capacity for rapid growth. In the case of the little child our tendency is to spend so much of our time and his in making sure that his hands and face are clean, that he remembers to shake hands with the visiting lady, that he puts on his rubbers when it rains, that he does not talk too much in the presence of adults, that he brushes his teeth, and goes to bed regularly at early hours, and obeys his elders; that we seldom have the intellectual leisure to recognize what a romantic figure the child is, a traveler in a strange and wonderful country, taking in through every flexible new sense a thousand fresh impressions of the great adventure of life, and formulating more and more clearly with every day's advance into the new country what shall be his attitude towards it?

Now, it is undoubtedly very necessary for him to learn to keep his face and hands clean, to eat with his fork, to chew his food thoroughly, to sit squarely on his chair, etc. Indeed, it is so necessary that until very recently all but a few sentimentalists thought that no more could be asked of a little child, and that all his energies should be uniquely directed to these matters. We no longer believe this theoretically. Although daily life is apparently made up of such small details, we see that if we limit our relations with a child mainly to the matter of rubbers, clean

faces and hands, presentable manners, we not only do our best to stunt and narrow his own life, but we cut ourselves off from him as soon (and it will be very soon) as he is a grown-man and quite able to wash his own face and hands, and put on his own rubbers. But it is hard to live up to our new ideas, and because the pressingly tangible, ever-present material matters are only to be kept in their places by a never-ending struggle, and it is hard to keep struggling. So we tend to allow them to occupy all of our life with the child, we give them first place in the hours we spend with the children; and other matters, like the growth in them of a rational and enlightened attitude towards the universe, are given what time and energy are left over after making sure that the boys remember to take off their hats in the house, and the girls to say "Excuse me!" when they pass in front of an adult. The bigger, immaterial, epoch-making incidents of their lives are unnoticed, unheeded, and often unwittingly repressed, in the clatter created by our impassioned desire that they shall wash behind their ears.

I remember hearing an old lady who was usually considered "queer" say to an aunt of mine, noted for the excellent "discipline" of her children: "Elizabeth, if one of your children should start to tell you that he had just received a gold medal for bravery, I do believe that you would stop him to say: 'Charley, how many times have I told you not to talk when your mouth is full? Wait till you have

chewed up your food and swallowed it, and then you may speak.'" And I remember my aunt's sticking stanchly to the ideals of her generation with her reply: "I certainly should, and I ought to." She at least was consistent. Our more modern attitude is not. We believe firmly that the child has a deeper and higher life, as much as we (and occasionally more). We acknowledge that it should have first place, and that minor matters should always come after. Theoretically we recognize the great truth that moments of spiritual and intellectual insight come as they list, and not when it is most convenient for us; that they are too precious to subordinate to any other considerations, and that if we always delay in welcoming them until clean finger-nails have been assured, we are very apt to lose them forever. Sitting quietly at ease, meditating on these great matters, we have the clearest ideas as to the right proportions to be kept, but when the actual child presents himself to us, inopportune, grimy, ungrammatical, brusque, filled with the holy desire to confess a fault without delay, we are very apt (ah, how much more apt if public opinion in the shape of an observant neighbor is present) to cut short the first faltering words of his confession by a "You mustn't break in on older people when they are talking, dear. And don't say 'We wasn't,' but 'We weren't.' And I *think* you can't have noticed that Mr. Blank is here. Go and shake hands with him, and say: 'Excuse me for interrupting.'" Perhaps an archangel could

go on and lay bare his heart after an introduction like that, but no human being can.

And that other comic story, at which we have all laughed, the boy who said if he should meet his mother in heaven, he knew her first words would be: "Jimmie Clark, you go right back and wipe the mud off your shoes!" Really, upon close inspection, that story is not so very funny, after all, at least when one is in the class with Jimmie's mother and no longer belongs to Jimmie's contemporaries. It seems to testify that Jimmie's experience of his mother leads him to expect her always to see the minor, superficial details of a situation rather than its real aspect. It testifies that Jimmie's mother, whatever her real convictions may be, has never been able sufficiently to master the mere machinery of life, to let her family know that she has any real convictions. It testifies to a lack of quickness and flexibility of spiritual insight as to the relative importance of small and great matters which is one of the dangerous snags in matrimony; and in parenthood a real submerged reef, responsible for innumerable unnecessary shipwrecks. A hundred familiar anecdotes bear witness to the commonness of its occurrence, and to the foolhardy recklessness with which we are content only to laugh at it. Every family which hands down oral tradition has several in its storehouse of funny stories. In our family we still quote laughingly a great-grandmother who is reported to have said at family prayers one morning: "'Lijah, did you black

your shoes as I told you? You finished molding the bread, didn't you, Milly? William, you took that pail of swill out to the pigs? Well, we will now pray the Lord to bless our home."

Practically we nearly always say to the child exactly as my great-grandmother said to the Lord, that we will give him time and strength after all the material necessities and proprieties have been attended to. Practically we insist that we will sympathize with him in the joys and sorrows and wonders of his exciting inner life only after we have taken care that he makes an appearance which will be a credit to us in the eyes of our neighbors. When the miracle of the resurrection bursts upon him with the sight of a butterfly emerging from the cocoon, we will answer his question only after he has remembered to say "Please," and not to shout too loudly. We will share with him his delighted interest in the anthill only after spreading over his enthusiasm a properly wet blanket of reproof about his having forgotten to blow his nose. And we reap the reward of other people who put off the greater till the lesser is provided for; we find that when we at last settle ourselves to welcome the greater it has taken wings to itself. Everyone is familiar with the symbolic figure of the man who spends all his life accumulating wealth and finds in the end that he has lost the capacity to enjoy it. But we miss the similar significance of that other familiar figure, the mother whose grown-up children have learned at last to keep

their faces admirably clean, to pretend to welcome people whom they do not wish to see, and to take their soup from the spoon without the faintest suspicion of a liquid gurgle, but who have also irrevocably learned the other lesson of finding their sympathy and understanding elsewhere than with their mother. Or else, as is the case in many lives, they have learned the arid lesson of going without sympathy and understanding, or with only fitful experiences of those blessings such as come occasionally through the chance encounter with an inspiring professor in college, who is, in some ways, for a year or so, a spiritual father or mother.

So here is one way in which we can struggle to bridge over the gulf between the generations. In our relations with the children, we can refuse to be tricked by the complexity of life into laying any more stress than is absolutely necessary on the purely material side of things. We can try with all our might to keep a receptive mind and an alert ear for the communications, always rare and elusive and shy, from the immortal souls and creative minds whose earthly habitations distress us so by being dirty and noisy and unkempt in childhood, and in adolescence by decking themselves out in gaudy socks and hairdressings which offend our taste. We can try with all our might to keep our sense of the proportions of things, to train our children to be clean and mannerly and presentable to the neighbors, and yet instantly to throw all these considerations overboard

at any crisis, if they threaten to interfere with the vigor of their intellectual life or with the delicacy of their spiritual perceptions.

I lived in a college town in my childhood, one of the humorous figures of which was the professor of entomology, a tall, gaunt, stooping man, who was as much noted for his lack of social graces as for the remarkable acumen of his mind. He was a bachelor with no family of his own, but, although he used none of that grinning pretense of being a little boy which marks the usual bachelor who wishes to be liked by children, he was deep in the confidence of all the faculty sons and daughters. He never put himself out to be entertaining to children, he was mercilessly cold to any "smart-aleck" attempts to show off, he was often very brusque, and never at all smiling and jolly; but, although we never "fooled" joyfully with him as we did with other bachelor friends of our fathers, we invariably turned to him with our serious interests, of which we had, like most children, more than our elders believed. At the time I naturally made no attempt to analyze the attraction old Professor Quincy had for us, but in thinking it over since, I have become aware that it came solely from the quickness of his ear in detecting the note of seriousness in us. He used for the children who chanced to touch his life the same trained discrimination between the merely fortuitous and the really significant, which made him so highly successful as a scientist. As a finely-trained musi-

cian's ear detects the difference between the banging and strumming of an ordinary child and the crude attempts at real rhythm of the musically gifted child, so Professor Quincy knew in a flash the difference between the idle, trivial chatter and the unreasonable demands such as children incessantly make and the rare moments when the germ of a true intellectual process was being quickened to life. He was by no means tolerantly good-natured towards the chatter or the childishness if it disturbed him, but how sure was a certain little girl of his knowing before she had spoken three words that she was on the track of something of real importance.

I did not happen to see it myself, but I was brought up on the laughing account of his flight early one summer morning, through the streets of the gossipy little community, clad in dressing-gown and slippers, and leading by the hand a little boy in night-drawers. The child was the son of his next-door neighbor, and had pattered over to the professor's solitary breakfast-table to show him a beetle, and ask something about its anatomy. Although nobody else would have made much out of the question, it showed, according to Professor Quincy, so intelligent and original a turn of mind that he was electrified, and, leaving his cup of coffee untasted, he sprang to his feet, took the little inquirer straight to the big microscope in the laboratory, and gave him his first lesson in entomology. I am bound to add that the little boy grew up into a physician and not

into an entomologist, but the anecdote illustrates at least why all children turned to grim "old Q" when they had something vital on their minds.

It was not that he was universally welcoming to us, for he was anything but that; it was not that he never told us to run away and not bother him, for he frequently did; it was not because we received any sympathy for hurt vanity from him, for he distilled a singularly acid sarcasm on suffering from that cause. It was because he was served apparently by a sixth sense, and never failed to know whether the child interrupting his studies and dripping muddy water on his best rug had come in to propound some outrageous scheme of keeping rabbits in the back parlor or was trying for the first time to phrase a question about the nature of death. It occurs to me now that his secret (which every parent of us would do well to study and try to acquire) was the quick use of his sympathetic imagination, acting on the facts which reached him, undistorted, through the medium of that perfectly open mind which is the ideal of scientists. That is, when a child presented himself, Professor Quincy's first penetrating glance was directed, not at any externals, but at the child himself. If, as frequently happened, there was nothing at that moment in the child's life deserving the attention of a noted scientist, he was dismissed with no ceremony. But if there was stirring in him any attempt towards an intelligent understanding of the world, the noted scientist bent his every faculty

to the preservation of that germ so precious to his and every science. He failed notably in patience and charity towards childish weaknesses, but no child who knew him can deny the validity and firmness of the bridge between youth and age which was provided by his insight; and those of us who are now parents remember him with a great desire to put his plank into the bridge we are trying to build between us and our children.

## DISCARDING THE PRETENSE OF OMNISCIENCE

In addition to the use of insight, we can strengthen that bridge in another manner by discarding from among our building material the old, half-rotten plank of omniscience, which looks so imposing to the parental eye, but which always breaks in two under the foot of the unwary person who trusts in it as a means of keeping in touch with children after they are out of their very early years. It is not easy to discard. Nothing is sweeter than to lose for a time the sense of our erring humanity and to see the trusting eyes of the five- and six- and seven-year-olds looking up at us as we look up to divine strength and goodness. But we are inexorably punished if we attempt to force this perilous pleasure an instant beyond its natural duration into the life of the ten- and eleven- and fourteen-year-old. In the first place, such enforced prolongation (if it is successful) has for fastidious moral palates a slightly sickly and unwholesome taste; and furthermore (if the children are worth anything), we pay for it the heavy price of a later sure and inevitable violent reaction into a blighting and wholesale skepticism of all parental wisdom or fairness. The transitory belief in the all-wisdom and all-goodness of the parents should

be replaced in the child's mind by the other fortifying and permanent sight of them as only trying, like himself, to do the best they can in the midst of very complicated problems. The first idea should, at the right moment, drop from the child's mind painlessly as the leaf falls from the tree on a windless autumn afternoon, leaving no scar behind it.

It can disappear thus, however, only if the parents have kept their own integrity rigorously free from suspicion and have never, not even once, initiated the child into the sinister meaning of the verb " to bluff." It is only the half-educated teacher who never dares admit ignorance on a given point, and they are parents morally under par who never dare admit that they have been wrong. Being human they frequently are wrong; and their children, having keen eyes for reality, know it very well. They might as well again try to extract some profit from a hard necessity and apply to themselves the same honest scalpel of analysis on which (if they are enlightened) they rely so much to attain fairness in their treatment of the children. It is admitted that to understand a situation goes a long way towards mastering it. Why should we refuse the children this aid to a mastery of their problem? In the attempt to regulate rationally and fairly our personal relations, there is nothing which helps us so much as a clear idea of just what motives are in action, why people act as they do. We try our best to keep this idea clear in our own heads. Why should we befog

it in the case of the children? Why should a little "mea culpa" like the following addressed to a boy old enough to reason be considered as such lèse-majesté against the might, majesty, and dignity of parenthood? "See here, Billy, when I was so provoked at you yesterday for upsetting the jardinière and breaking the pot, it was partly because I was awfully tired and nervous from having been up the night before with the baby. Suppose we both of us try to be more careful after this. You try not to thrash around so wildly in the house and I'll try to remember not to be so hard on you about something you didn't really intend to do." This seems to me a quite ordinary attempt towards decent fairness in one's relation with the child, but if I ever advance some such simple idea in conversation with other mothers I am treated as a traitor to the parental caste. They cry out upon me: "Why, if you admit that your whole authority is gone! How is the child to know that the next time you reprove him for a really naughty action it may not be simply because you are tired and nervous again?"

He knows, it seems to me, as we all know the ins and outs of the people we live with, by the exercise of ordinary good sense, and it will be found that children are by no means behind adults in the accuracy with which they read the characters of those about them. By the time he has had seven or eight years of constant living with his mother, Willie knows, whether she admits it or not, that his reproof

came largely from nerves, and that his punishment was too severe for an unintentional offense. The only question is whether he is to be brought to a conviction of the entire probity of his mother's character or not.

That is, after all, the one big pivot on which the whole question turns. Emerson says of social reforms and reformers: "It is of little moment that one or two or twenty errors of our social system be corrected, but of much that the man be in his senses. Society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things about him." He might have been writing of that smaller model of society, the family. The very latest methods in education, the *dernier cri* of modernity about the relation of parent to child, will benefit those relations not at all, if the parent himself be not renovated. Of course, the delicate, the awkward, the difficult part of his position is the fact that he is taken, so to speak, unawares. He cannot wait until he has perfected his character (as if anyone ever did that) before he undertakes the training and care of his children. He must deal with them while he is still wrestling with many childish weaknesses in his own heart. Whatever renovation is done must go on under the very observant eye of childhood. But could there be a better spectacle, after all, for the very observant eye of childhood? Could there be an example more calculated to encourage imitation? It is true that if his mother confesses to Willie that she

scolded him largely to relieve her own nerves, Willie's mind will thenceforth be open to the conception that she may do it again, but as far as that is concerned Willie's mind will not forever stay shut to the conception, whether she confesses it or not. And I think she need not fear the corroding effect of this revelation of a small weakness on her part, if at the same time Willie's mind is opened to the saving idea that his mother's desire is to do the fair thing, rather than to save her face. If he is convinced of that, their relations are on bedrock. If not, his mother's influence in his life will be more and more in the nature of an irritant, resisted in the measure of his increasing strength, and will finally fade away to nothing more than the arid desire to "do his duty by Mother," because it is his duty and must be done. Our rationalistic world has argued out of existence the old inviolable rightness of parental acts, which, like the old regal dignity, was like a magic charm that yielded before the first questioning voice. It was said of Louis XIV that he had so ingrained a certainty of his own divinity that he succeeded in impressing the crowd of courtiers in his bedchamber with the conviction that when he did it the act of taking off a nightcap in the morning was an essentially kingly performance. But no king of a later date than Louis has been able to find a crowd of courtiers who would swallow that pretension. And few modern children who have begun to reason at all can be made to think that an unjust act, because

Mother has done it, is therefore a righteous one, or that a snap-judgment, based on a muddle-headed misunderstanding of the factors involved, is a good solution to a difficulty because Father has set his foot down that it must be thus. They have so little experience with other adults, they are forced by the nature of the family life to fix their remarkably keen eyes with such concentration on their parents that they early come to have a penetrating knowledge of the sort of thing (whether vital or petty) which causes Father to set his foot down, and which moves Mother to take one side or the other in a perplexity. And they are quite aware whether the usual mental attitude of the family towards an undecided question is one of openness, reasonableness, and fair-minded receptivity to all legitimate arguments and to all the information which can be secured, or whether, when a vexed question comes up, the family habit is to enter upon a vociferous period of heated presentation of pet prejudices, one set of which settles down into resentment at the victory of the other side. Of course, they do not at all times of their development do full justice to the motives of those in authority over them. Their ardent desire to have what they want often makes them on some one special occasion resent bitterly the most righteous judgment, based on the most enlightened reason. They go through many phases like the rest of us. But the sum total of their knowledge is of an accuracy quite astonishing. In fact, it is exactly the accuracy of

their knowledge of their parents which is the cause of a wonderfully sweet and mitigating aspect of the family relation. Contrasted to the occasionally encountered deep-lying hostility between grown-up child and parent, which, as we have noted as existing in some cases in spite of our sentimental attempt to mask that fact, everyone must have known cases of a curious, nameless, apparently causeless affection between adult children and their parents, who to all outward appearance have absolutely nothing in common. It is customary to refer this to some mysterious blood-tie, but it is more likely that it is another result of the terribly searching knowledge of those within the family circle. It is not, thank Heaven, only unsuspected weaknesses and vices which are discovered in the unsparing light; and the grudging tolerance which suddenly at a crisis flares up into a surprising heat of affection comes from one of the most consolatory facts that can be learned about human nature, namely, that people may not only be very different from us and very irritating to us, but can be positively weak, erring, and wrong, and still possess precious virtues and most endearing qualities. One reason for holding with all our might to the much-attacked institution of the home and family is that in no other school can this austerely comforting lesson be so forced upon the most recalcitrant minds; and that out of the family circle it is only the rarest spirits which ever attain that half-divine insight, going deeper than conscious reason, and re-

sulting in a love which frees us from bitterness of spirit with the faults of others.

One of the most calming and sobering influences in my own childhood was the quaint mannerism of my godfather, who was wont, when appeal was made to him, to lay aside his book, hitch his eyeglasses to a little hook on his waistcoat, lean back in his chair, put the tips of his fingers together with a judicial air, and slowly and seriously pronounce a never-varying formula: "Well—now—let us *consider* this question." The phrase was like oil on the troubled waters of controversy. Out of the steam and fog of our intense personal preferences rose up the Gibraltar-like outline of the real merits of the case. Hypnotically our young minds accepted his own attention to the true proportions of things. We abandoned, scarcely conscious of what we did, our first intentions to confuse the issue by outcries and passion, special pleading and appeals to well-known weak sides of the authorities. We stated our case, sometimes unexpectedly shrunk away to nothing in this clear white light, sometimes unexpectedly stronger than we thought. Our remarks were given grave consideration and an answer returned which always began: "Well, I'm going to tell you the reasons I see against your having your own way. If you can show me they don't exist or aren't very important, you can have your own way. If not, of course you'll have to give it up."

We were put on our mettle by that "of course,"

which took for granted our acceptance of a reasoning being's point of view. And whether in the end we had or had not our own way, we left that lucid presence with a clearer understanding of civilized methods of procedure. No matter what it was, our proposition had received genuine consideration.

And now that we are no longer young, more than one of us confess to feeling ourselves steadied and braced in a moment of heat or vexation by the echo in our ear of that quiet voice, with its appeal to eternal standards of reason and fairness: "Well—now—let us *consider* this proposition."

One of the solemn and daunting factors in the problem of home-life is the irrevocable accuracy of the childish memory, which registers with impartial vividness whatever good and whatever bad are encountered. Upon it for all their lifetime is stamped the recollection of a system founded on reason and justice and honesty or that other system which, confronted with a difficult situation in child-life, foams over into a lather of peremptory commands. Like the rest of us, they are often not consciously aware of what goes on in their heads, and they may spend years under a régime of affectionate tyranny or mismanagement parading as "mother-love" without openly revolting from it. But somewhere in their subconsciousness there is hung a true balance, into the one or the other scale of which goes every act, every decision, every revelation of character made by

those about them. When the time of trial comes, when there is an important question to be decided or a cross-roads in morality is reached, the balance tips once for all. And then we so often have the spectacle, astonishing, touching, tragic, of the adolescent at a crisis turning with apparent cruelty and ingratitude away from the hearts which have loved him so dearly, and which yearn over him so fondly now.

Every minister, every college professor, every person at all in the public eye as a teacher or mentor, has had the strange experience of being suddenly asked by a young person, almost a stranger, for advice about some terribly momentous personal question, and has encountered over and over again the same passionate unwillingness to return to the family circle for counsel. The very phrases that are used grow wretchedly familiar: "Oh, no, I wouldn't speak to my father about it for anything! Mother wouldn't understand! I never talk to my parents about such things." Armed with the old fallacy that to give a name to a thing is to explain it, we have disposed of such phenomena by saying: "It is often easier to speak to strangers about intimate things than to somebody you know." That is true. The question that should fill parents with a passion of self-questioning is, *why* it is true. The adolescent cannot tell you why. He does not know why. He is only acting with a sure instinct on the knowledge accumulated during years of observation. He is quite unable to analyze the violence of his reaction from parental

influence; and he often unwisely turns from a parent to someone quite as faulty. He needs something which he does not possess, and he turns instinctively to where he can find it or where he thinks he can find it: he does not turn to where he is convinced he cannot find it. Because of his youth, the blatant newness of his self-confidence is undermined at crucial moments by a sick self-distrust. For all his sureness of his own wisdom he knows that he is inexperienced in life; when it comes to an important point he doubts his own ability to decide a vexed question with fairness, with impartiality, with a grasp on all the elements involved. Have his experiences at home taught him to expect his parents to decide questions on the ground of fairness and impartiality, and is he accustomed to see them examine a situation open-mindedly before pronouncing judgment? If so, he will not be one of those pathetic young people who lay bare to strangers the secrets of their hearts; nor will he shut himself up in a bitter, misanthropical distrust of all humanity. But if he feels instinctively that Mother will not even wait to hear the case stated in full, but will decide hastily on one superficial point which chances to offend her taste; if he knows that because the problem touches upon one of Father's deep-rooted personal prejudices, it will not have a fair hearing; if he knows that he must wait until they are both in "just the right mood" to expect a reasonable consideration; if he feels that they will not do justice to his newly-grown

ability and desire to cope with responsibility himself, but will think of him as the child he recently was, one of two things will happen. He will either wrestle with his problem alone and unobserved, with no help from riper judgment than his own, or he will be another boy who makes people talk about the "hard egotism of the young in turning away indifferently from their parents."

The truth is that while his parents are lamenting his desertion he is casting desperately about to find a father and mother. The fact of having passed eighteen birthdays, or twenty-one, or even thirty, does not free a human being from the instinct to lean on tried wisdom and strength—the child's instinct, the human instinct. The grown man, struggling with terribly vital problems, often feels the need more acutely than in his self-confident earlier years. But it must be real strength and real wisdom, if it is to be suited to his needs. The old sort of coddling and petting "mothering" is not a staff on which to lean except in moments of relaxation, when no staff is really needed. No matter how fast he may have grown, his parents had the start of him, and if they have not stopped growing, they will have amassed more unembittered knowledge of the world, more confidence in the better elements of life, more philosophy, more calm than he. "If they have not stopped growing." That is a pregnant "if," on which the matter turns. So many times the tragedy comes because besotted parents, with a misguided

passion for service, have so lavished themselves on the child's lesser needs that they have stunted their own individualities, have not developed and ripened as they might, and so are pitifully inadequate to the spiritual needs of the child in maturity, to gain whose confidence they would give their lives. For though the affection of a mother, unwavering, unaffected by change or adversity, is almost as great a thing as even sentimental poets would have us think, it is a mere palliative of human perplexities, not a genuine help unless it is supported by the weight of an individuality commanding real respect. And the manifestations of even the deep-rooted maternal love, if unguided by a clear head and a ripe judgment, are apt to be childishly, occasionally grotesquely unsuitable as helps to grown human beings in the press of the hard battle with life. A man can hire someone to mend his socks for him, to remember his little whimsies of taste, and to sit up o' nights for him; but he is destitute indeed if he must turn away to untried strangers in the hope of finding what is more necessary to him than food, the belief in sanity, insight, and justice. He needs that belief desperately, if he is not to suffer moral shipwreck, so desperately that unless he is made of stern stuff, he cannot endure living without it, and violates every deeply-ingrained instinct for reticence about sacred matters by applying for it to a casual passerby. The young girls who tearfully waylay their favorite instructor in college, to ask her advice on an affair of

which she can know nothing; the young men who wait with set faces in the twilight of a clergyman's study to lay before him a case of conscience which could only be decided by someone with a complete knowledge of the circumstances,—what are they but living symbols of the immense need for fatherhood and motherhood?

No, the younger generation do not turn away from us because they no longer need help. If they throw us on one side, it is precisely because they need help more than ever before, because their needs have outgrown our capacity to meet. They no longer need exhortations to learn their spelling-lessons, to shut the door behind them when they go out, and to keep a clean handkerchief in their pockets. Perhaps they never needed quite so many of such exhortations as we gave them. They need to be braced in a belief in the existence and unshakable validity of truth and honor and magnanimity. Perhaps they always needed that more than we were willing to believe. Their longing is the old, old longing of all humanity, to be sure, absolutely sure of someone's integrity, and aching with that desire they fling themselves upon any track which seems to lead them there. If it leads them by the old, well-remembered ways of childhood straight back to their own parents, we need not fear that any fitfulness or fickleness of heart will long keep them elsewhere.

# MATERNITY NO LONGER A POSITION FOR LIFE

## WHEN WE ARE GRANDMOTHERS

As nearly everyone has remarked, this business of being a mother is a queer one, and in many respects quite unlike any other, but the queerest part of it often escapes mention in all the talk about maternity. I mean the fact of the inevitable impermanence of the business; the fact that, breathlessly absorbing as it is while it lasts, a mother is sure to find herself dismissed from the job at the very time when, as it seems to her, she has just learned how best to carry it on; the fact that overwhelmingly busy as she is for a time, she finds that in middle life, in the prime of her powers, she is banished to the dismal ranks of the army of the unemployed.

Fanciful writers compare us mothers sometimes to gardeners, tending, training, and sheltering young plants, first in the hot-house conditions necessary to babyhood, then little by little "hardening them off" as the gardener's phrase runs, till, sturdy bushes or stately trees in full maturity, they stand out under the open sky, taking the weather as it comes, bearing fruit and flowers of their own, living witnesses to the skill and patience of the gardener. That is all very well as a figure of speech; but suppose the gardener denied the privilege of beginning the next season

with another crop of young plants, and condemned never again to exercise his profession. Would he not join the modern mother of a grown-up family in her painful bewilderment at Fate?

Or, in another literary comparison, authors, wishing to turn a pretty phrase, say that a mother is like the captain of a ship, struggling to steer a straight course through reefs and shoals and mighty deeps, and at last bringing the precious cargo through the tempests and languors of adolescence safely into the port of maturity. Again all very well, but suppose the captain forbidden to undertake another voyage, and condemned to languish idly in a windless port all the rest of his days. Would he not feel, in common with many a middle-aged mother, a distressing emptiness in his life? I think his heart would fail him as he discharged his passengers, wished them Godspeed and wistfully watched them step off with self-confident strides into the far country of their own lives. I think he would succumb to the temptation the mother knows so well, to cry reproachfully after the retreating forms, "After all I have done for you, how can you leave me alone?" I think he would feel the same wild impulse which the mother of grown-up children feels swelling her heart, to run desperately after the much-loved young travelers and to try vainly with cumbering affection to go along with them on a journey which is none of hers.

Ah, happy gardener, who may turn and turn

again to his work as long as his strength lasts and the seasons follow each other! Ah, thrice blessed captain, who as long as he has wit and courage may feel himself a necessary part of the work of the world! Ah, mother sore-beset by the strange ending to the great adventure of maternity!

But we are told by wise men and philosophers that nothing can befall us which we have not brought upon ourselves. Let us consider, therefore, through what dullness of wit we mothers are responsible for this apparently unavoidable period of painful maladjustment. In the first place, we have been caught napping by changed economic conditions which have almost transformed our lives before we bestirred ourselves to recognize them. This is not one of the world-old problems of womankind. To a considerable extent it is really something new under the sun. A hundred years ago it did not press upon women of middle age as it does now. For one thing, mothers then had as a rule many more children than they have now—those were the days when a woman could say, "Yes, all of my children have had the measles now except my four little girls." This made her much older when the nest was empty than are her great-grandchildren of to-day, older in years and much older than her years in physical wear and tear. Her life differed from ours in another more important feature. She was allowed, indeed in most cases was required, to begin over again with the new generation. Her numerous daughters were

apt to marry very young, and finding themselves at an early age, with no maturity of character and no experience of life, suddenly immersed in the troubled waters of matrimony and maternity, they reached out eager hands for the strength and wisdom of their mothers. "Grandma's house" was rarely without at least one of the grandchildren sojourning in that hospitable haven while his own family weathered out some domestic storm. If none of the grandchildren were there, it was apt to be because grandma herself had put on her bonnet and sallied forth in response to a cry of distress from some one of the various homes where she was "consulting expert."

It all sounds very simple and livable, and we may be pardoned for the sigh of regret with which we look back on those homely conditions, viewing them, as people always do the past, through the golden haze of sentimental retrospect. But we may not be pardoned if we attempt to persuade ourselves that those conditions still exist, and that we have a right to look forward to being that variety of grandmother. The fact is nowadays that not only may we not hope to be that variety of grandmother, but that quite possibly we may not be grandmothers at all. Our daughters do not look forward to matrimony with the fixity of intention of our grandmothers. It may very easily happen that they will prefer some other form of service to the blessed old way of family life, so dear to us. In any case we will almost certainly not become grandmothers until

after our children have had several years of independent life and have achieved a maturity of character and an experience of affairs which make them able and eager to cope themselves with their own domestic problems. The grandchildren will almost certainly not be so numerous that their mother cannot care for them, and they will no sooner be out of their babyhood than the modern, highly organized school system will snatch them not only out of grandmotherly, but even out of motherly arms.

The last resort of our grandmothers is also denied us, that of housekeeping as a profession. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that this is not nowadays an occupation sufficient to fill out the life of an active woman in her prime. There are no great operations of brewing, spinning, weaving, pork-curing, soap-making, and the like to give grandma the illusion that she is as busy as she once was. Like all her contemporaries she buys ready-made what used to be manufactured in the home. Any woman who is accustomed to run her house as an accompaniment to the care of children will find it sorry work to try to make it the sole occupation of her life.

Do you ask why it is necessary to set down all these well-known facts about modern domestic life? It is necessary because, although we know them perfectly well, we persist in living our lives in entire disregard of them. A young mother, struggling with a five-year-old and a two-year-old, and another one

expected, finds it impossible to believe that the children, *her* children, will grow up and leave her. Indeed, she seems to herself to have no time for so idle a thing as speculation about her own future, so jealously do the children demand every ounce of her care and thought. But, no matter how distracting the hurly-burly of the present, she blames herself if she does not provide her little ones with food and physical surroundings which will make their maturity happy and vigorous. And yet she is preparing for that same maturity of theirs the saddest of shadows a conscientious human being can know, the sight of a human life which has been atrophied and withered that they might live.

If now, when the children are small, we are mothers *and nothing else*, we are making ourselves into narrow, stiff-jointed personalities which will paralyze their young energies just when they are about to enter upon the cares and burdens of their own lives. We may abstain from openly reproaching them for the crime of growing up, but if we do not take care now, while it is yet time, we shall come to be for our children nothing but the listless and depressing symbol of that reproach. How many families of grown-up children are there where the never-solved question is, "What shall we do with mother to make her happy?" And how often in family councils does one hear, "But mother must not be left alone!"

Just what does this last familiar apothegm mean? We would regard as criminally foolish any woman

who so tied up and neglected a part of her body as to make herself into an invalid and a care on her family; but we regard with sentimental sympathy the woman who, from a mistaken sense of duty, ties up and neglects whole sections of her mind and heart, so that she is a moral invalid and dependent on her children for that coddling of her personality without which it is not possible for her to find life endurable.

With the whole world to live in, with every interest of mind, hand, and heart open to her, "mother" has narrowed her interests so that she can be nothing but contagiously dreary and low-spirited unless one of the "children" (now men and women like herself) puts himself out to live the lie of being still dependent on maternal care. Or, if this is not possible, "mother" droops and pines, complains that she is no longer "necessary" to anyone, and casts a blight of cheerlessness upon the most remote of her children.

We all have seen this situation many times; and it is a curious commentary on human nature that none of us in our heart believes that we shall ever find its hard problems pressing upon us. We know well enough that in all probability we shall be only a little over fifty when the youngest of the children is practically grown up and straining like a young eagle to be free even from the loving bonds of our protecting affection. We know that the twenty years of life which will remain to us after that ought to be as valiant and vigorous and useful

years as any in our lives. And finally we know perfectly well that the children will not be children during that time. Oh, yes, we know it. But we don't believe it.

And right there is the sore spot on which the wise man would put his finger as the source of all the trouble. We ought to admit and face the fact, hard as it may seem, that whatever it may have been in other periods in history, at the present day *maternity is not the occupation of a lifetime.* It does not, as modern existence is organized, last long enough to fill adequately the entire length of a vigorous woman's existence. "But what hard conditions are these!" do we cry. "We are asked to give up twenty-five or thirty years of our lives to an occupation eminently absorbing and confining, and yet to emerge from it in middle life still flexible enough to turn to another method of existence." There is no denying that it is hard. But the reward is great beyond price. And is anything easy that is worth doing? Furthermore, we are to blame if we are taken by surprise, and unprepared. We knew well enough, when we became mothers, that children insist upon growing up, and that when they are adult, it is better for them to run their own lives.

So let us take counsel together, now while the children are still tugging at our skirts and filling our arms, what we shall be when they abandon us. How can we keep, throughout the years of the distractingly absorbing demands of little children,

enough of our own individuality for us to live with, when they are paddling their own canoes in waters strange to us?

It must be frankly admitted that for us, taken off our guard so to speak by this dilemma, there can be no entirely satisfactory solution of the difficulty. We must resign ourselves to expedients that are in the nature of things temporary and makeshift, because we cannot go back to the beginning and start over again. Those mothers who chance to be very competent and ingenious and physically strong and mentally alert may be able to supply adequately all the conflicting demands made upon a modern mother, at all the various stages of her life. But most of us, none too well equipped by nature or training for success, must be content with striking some sort of compromise which will keep us from failing too ignominiously. That is all we can do with our lives.

The sort of compromise made by any mother of the present generation must depend, of course, upon her individual temperament and capacities; but there is one expedient which should be open to all of us alike, the simple expedient of bearing in mind that while maternity is a job from which one is certain to be dismissed, matrimony is a position for life. The essential thing is to clasp John's hand so tightly over the little heads which crowd between you that when, with miraculous suddenness, they are no longer little nor between you, their father's hand is still

in yours. It is not only physical distance which separates. It may very easily chance that a man and a woman who began their adult life together have, during the teeming years of rearing a family, entirely lost touch with each other, although they may have slept under the same roof every night of those years. No platitude is more threadbare with repetition than that the centrifugal tendency of a man's life and the centripetal tendency of a woman's are apt to be intensified during the children's early years. And so we see the old familiar situation when the children are gone, the mother is left with the habit of seeing nothing but the home, now empty, and the father with the habit of looking only for a large measure of success, now no longer so essential as when, an anxious young father, he began concentrating on business to provide for his brood.

So this is the first way out of our wilderness, the realization that the children go, but their father remains; the effort to continue on more than mere speaking terms with him; the attempt to live life *with* him rather even than for him. This not only means the exorcising of the dread specter of loneliness, this not only means the comfort and solace of a loyal figure beside yours as you say good-bye to the children vanishing into adults, but it is the last and best service you can render them. After all is said and done, the sum total of the influence of the parents on the children's lives tallies exactly with the degree of valiance and sweetness and resourcefulness

with which the parents have met the years and gone along with life. In the fever and ferment of their own first meeting of adult years, we can do little directly for them. They must live their own lives. But because to live one's own life is at many moments a very formidable and daunting undertaking, their anxious and troubled young hearts are lightened and calmed by any proofs that the adventure of living may be a fortunate one. There is no proof which can so poignantly go home to them as their own intimate knowledge of peace, harmony, and good-will between their parents.

But it is no fairer to a husband to make him the sole occupation of one's life than to do the same misguided thing for children. One ought not to be wife only, any more than mother only. To be either of these things with any success presupposes being a person to begin with, and being a person presupposes having tastes, interests, judgments, and occupations of one's own. Let a woman, while she is still young, search her heart to know what would have been her keenest interest if she had not become a mother; and then let her hold fast to that interest through all the busy rush of rearing a family, let her hold fast to it in the fact of other demands, even in the fact of ridicule and laughter, yes, even though that interest be only a liking for tatting. Anything is better than having no personality at all. Whether her tastes turn to gardening, or to study, to teaching, or to preserving fruit, to sewing, paint-

ing pictures, or to social service, let her keep her little flame alive.

The mother of grown-up children finds herself in exactly the position, notoriously perilous, of the business-man who has retired from active life while still vigorous. Let her look at the fortunes of that individual, which, like her own, vary according to the means taken to meet the new conditions of life. Some fall into a flabby listless inaction, others rise to greater heights of purposeful energy than they have ever known. Some fret themselves into nervous prostration, others discover in themselves unsuspected mines of interest and capacity which lead to happy years of usefulness. It all depends upon the factor which means happiness or misery to all of us at all times of our lives. If there is something to do worth doing, we will be happy. If not we will be miserable. In the life of the average American woman of to-day, coming from a fairly prosperous family, there are two danger-points. The first is in her girlhood, when her formal education is finished, and she faces life with all the full flowing vigor of her youth turned back upon itself by the lack of real work to do. For most of us this period of uneasiness is ended by our plunge into the absorbing and exalting task of bringing up a family. But that does not last out our lifetime. And in middle age we face a second time the problem which oppressed our youth, how to find something worth doing which we are able to do. There is nothing

but this to the problem of the mother-with-grown-up-children. But this is enough!

Like the retired business-man, we are in a much harder position than those people whose work is continuous, and who at fifty or fifty-five are putting their mature energy and staying power into work which has occupied them since youth. We must not only do our new work, but find it, and it is hard to find things at fifty or fifty-five. Of course, therefore, what we ought to do is to begin to find it long before we are fifty, so that when the inevitable comes we may slide smoothly into our new element like a boat launched head-on, and not splash into it like a man tossed overboard. And although, coming late to our work, we are at a disadvantage compared to those who have been steadily devoting themselves to it, our very freshness to the subject we choose has some advantage in it. We have more experience of life than specialists can have, we have come closer to humanity and to reality in many ways than they ever can. Almost all business-men with active minds find themselves increasingly preoccupied with some aspects of modern society which they long to look into at their leisure. One business-man of my acquaintance has for his goal a searching inquiry into the subject of taxation. He has been so struck in the course of his business by the inconsistencies and barbarities of the present system of taxation that he can hardly wait for the day to come when he may try to make some sense out of it. Will anyone say

that, untrained in theoretical political economy though he may be, he will not bring to his investigation as valuable qualifications for the work as many a college professor, who has read all the books ever written on the subject. He will have, to offset the professor's technical knowledge, his grasp on actual business conditions as they are, his observations on the real working of taxation as it exists, his hardly bought experience in forcing things to come to pass somehow in a very imperfect world, instead of theorizing about how they ought to work.

Another old friend of mine, now almost ready to retire from active work, has been all his life a highly successful corporation lawyer; and his dream is to devote himself to a study of how words may be made accurately to express thought! All during his career he has been impressed by the fact that language is the master not the servant of the thoughts of most men, and that it warps and perverts and twists most ideas instead of expressing them lucidly. He will not know as much as a professor of English rhetoric about the traditional technic of language-study, but what a freshness of viewpoint will be his! And what fervor in his chosen undertaking. For him it is a vital matter, which touches real life in a vital way.

Nowadays, with increasing frequency, many middle-aged matrons are making themselves more useful to the world than ever before by applying to various forms of social uplift the experience, the

poise, the knowledge of life which they have acquired in the years of their mothering. And they are not the listless or lonely ones! Even though many of their contemporaries have not their taste or capacity for adventuring into public life, the valiant spirit of their beneficent lives is worth imitating.

It is usually taken for granted that the close attention given to home economics and the training of children during twenty or thirty years will cause most matrons to turn naturally to some phase of similar activity in the community, "neighborhood work" or college settlement, or crusades for pure milk, or against child-labor. And it is true that a majority find their interests along these lines. But it not infrequently happens that after twenty or thirty years of enforced attention to the needs of children and the cares of a home a woman with no especial native passion for those occupations turns to something else entirely. She finds that her flagging interest in life, her decreasing zest for occupying herself, a certain flaccidity of mental attitude which she usually thinks is the inevitable concomitant of advancing years may yield entirely at the touch of a totally new interest. A certain grandmother of my acquaintance astonished all her family by "going in for beetles" as her grandchildren put it, and, from a Stygian ignorance of entomology, has developed into an alert and keen-eyed observer and investigator who was able, more than anyone else in the community, to give useful information to

experts trying to stamp out an insect pest. A conventional-minded person once asked her how she ever happened to begin the study of insects and was a little shocked by her whimsical answer, "Well, I wanted a real rest from 'mothering' and bugs seemed to need it less than anything else." Without going so far, a good many middle-aged women if they were honest would admit that they have always had cravings for some phase or other of life, or study, or activity which was not connected with the traditional occupations of home-keeping women. I do not intend here—the list is too well known—to cite the numerous and honorable examples of people who have acquired new accomplishments and made themselves useful in new ways after middle life.

"It is too late! Ah, nothing is too late
Till the tired heart shall cease to palpitate.
Cato learned Greek at eighty; Sophocles
Wrote his grand Oedipus, and Simonides
Bore off the prize of verse from his compeers,
When each had numbered more than fourscore years."

To offset the daunting quality of these great examples, rather too high for ordinary mortals to try to imitate, let me cite a very homely example in my own circle. An elderly woman of plain antecedents, left in the familiar old situation of loneliness after her children had grown up and married, had apparently not one weapon with which to fight off dry-rot. With the usual misguided devotion of grown-up sons and daughters, her children besought her to

"take it easy" while they looked out for her. "Mother has worked so hard all her life, it's time she should have an easy time." Her instinctive good sense came to her rescue in front of this insidious temptation and she turned resolutely away from this facile "descensus" into the Avernus of sloth, idle misery, and melancholy, and cast about for a real interest of her own. Her intense absorption in a very difficult domestic life had left her with but the faint memory of one other interest. Before her marriage she had intended to learn how to do "spatter-work" and never since had she had time enough to go on. Undeterred by good-natured shouts of laughter that anyone in this day and age should go back to so antiquated a fancy as "spatter-work," the very name of which was unfamiliar to her grandchildren, she looked up old directions, and began. The results were about what might have been expected—at first! But she did not stop. She kept on. And after a time she began to apply the old principle in modern designs to modern fabrics and then produced articles which made people stop and inquire if that were a new form of Japanese decoration. The elderly artist, after years of enforced concentration on the useful, felt the most vivid delight in struggling to produce something ornamental. She threw all of her energy, staying power, and ingenuity, acquired in "managing" a family, into the work, experimented with dyes, branched out into other similar methods of decoration, took lessons from a Japanese student,

was undismayed by failure, and—to make a long story short—is now conducting a sort of "home factory" which has a limited output of very exclusive fabrics and designs, and in which a young-lady-granddaughter is only too glad to co-operate with her grandmother. "Grandma" in that family is by no means the traditional unconsidered old party who has to be helped across the street because she is afraid of the automobiles.

Somewhere between Longfellow's shining roll of illustrious old and the woman who had nothing but a dimly recollected interest in "spatter-work" there ought to be a place for every one of us. In any case, whatever gifts we may cultivate, let us cultivate most of all any capacity we may have simply to enjoy life, which is perhaps the greatest gift of all.

Someone has said that everything in life is a paradox. He neglected to say that some paradoxes are very cheerful ones. There is no cheerfuller paradox than the queer twist of fate which befalls the middle-aged mother who has somehow managed to preserve enough of her own personality to live with in the last score of years of her life. If she is equipped with any devices to enable her to live bravely and well, if she is prepared to fill up the space left by the desertion of the children with books or music or social service, or work of her own, if she is able to live serenely and whole-heartedly without her children, she is the very one they will want in their lives.

## A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

THE various expedients advocated in the preceding article for meeting the perplexities of a modern mother of grown-up children are all very well, as far as they go. And they probably go as far as any of us in this generation are able to go. But there is something more which we can do which will benefit society even more than our makeshift attempts to put ourselves to work after the undertaking of maternity is over. We can do some honest, unfrightened thinking about the whole matter. We can try to put aside our deeply ingrained traditions, to divest ourselves of our passionately held prejudices, and to look at the relations of the modern world to family life as they really are. Since few women are born radicals, and fewer still are trained to any sympathy with ideas that clash with tradition, any such investigation is bound to hurt us, to wound many sensitive places in our souls, and at the very least to startle and shock us. I myself have just emerged from such a long experience of anxious questioning, and though somewhat sore and shaken, I am so much less hurt than I feared that I am eager to set down my adventures, as a reassurance to other mothers who feel as I do, a menacing threat directed at family life by modern conditions.

As a first step to any discussion of the subject, I encountered everywhere, accepted as an axiom by all thinking people, this dictum, "Society needs for its highest development the full, purposeful, well-directed activity of every one of its members." I granted this, of course, making in my own mind the defiant addition, "But what better activity could any woman have than the training of her children?" The authorities, consulted in my effort to find answers to my questions, replied in substance, "In that axiom, 'activity' is modified by three adjectives, 'full, purposeful, and well-directed.' Let us see if they can all be applied to your hypothetical mother training her little children. Take your own case as typical. Suppose you have three children, a year-and-a-half apart, a more favorable condition for their home-life than usually exists. Now it is not only universally admitted that children in a large family are better off than those in a small one, but also that the more nearly children are of the same age, the more in common, naturally, are their tastes, amusements, and capacities. Hence the chosen friend of your six-year-old son is not his four-year-old brother, but the six-and-a-half-year-old son of your neighbor, with whom he plays all the time you permit him. But your neighbor is excluded from any continuous service to society because she must care for her little son, while, in the next house, you claim to be in the same situation, although as a matter of fact the two children

spend most of their time together. Is there not here a waste of the time of you two women? Why not systematize this very common situation a little? Why could not you and your neighbor combine forces in the following simple manner: you agree to care for both children (who being together and amusing each other are easier to care for than one singly) on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, while your neighbor takes care of them on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. This would leave you three free days a week, which every busy housekeeper knows might well be employed in attending with more ease to the affairs of your personal household, and perhaps taking more interest in the affairs of your larger household, the municipality, or the State? You allow your little boy to spend half of his time playing with his little friend as it is, why not simply make it a regular thing, on which you can count, in the distribution of your time?

"Suppose now, to make the hypothetical case more apt, that, by an odd chance, your neighbor should also have three children, just about the ages of yours. Why would it not be a good idea for each of you to concentrate on the six children, three days a week, the care and attention which you now wastefully reduplicate on three children apiece. You cannot claim that it takes every moment of your day to wash, dress, feed, and care for three children. They do not demand something from you at every moment of the day. They only demand something at suffi-

ciently frequent intervals so that you cannot continuously (and hence effectively) attend to anything else. Some grown person must be on hand, though not by any means always occupied."

My latent suspicions sprung into flame. I had a stone wall to oppose to this disquieting innovation, and told myself hotly, "That's simply Communism, revoltingly applied to children! That would mean that my neighbor was half bringing up my children! I won't have that! I want to bring them up myself! They are *my* children!" I went on, indignantly naming over to myself the innumerable reasons why I wanted to bring up my own children—I brought to mind the nestful of happy fledglings, fluttering to and from my knee, turning their sweet eyes upon me for guidance in the world to which I had brought them, running to me for help in their games, for sympathy in their sorrows, while I, passionately and utterly absorbed in them, felt that the world without them would be unendurably dreary.

But in the midst of painting this picture of domestic life I seemed to hear my mother's voice, sorrowfully describing an intimacy with adolescent girlhood, just as sweet as mine with my little ones, which she had courageously foregone when, at seventeen, I ceased forever sharing my daily life and thoughts with her. And yet I had not gone to college against my mother's will. With this new preoccupation darkening my mind, I wondered for the first time how she had been able to summon the reso-

lution to send me. It was, I felt it with a sinking heart, because she knew it would be better for me than anything she could do at home.

I shifted my ground hastily from the personal, and assured myself with dignity that, of course, I do not wish to keep my babies with me for the mere selfish pleasure I take in their presence. I want—every mother worthy the name wants to do what is really best for them—what is best for everyone concerned. Upon making this admission I was apprehensively aware of a certain mental giddiness, as though I had thrown down a sheltering wall, beyond which I now saw stretching before me a horizon disquietingly wider than the pleasant narrow paths which my feet know so well. I had committed myself to an impersonal breadth of view, from which, as from all impersonal attitudes, blew a cold breath of logic upon the emotions. It was necessary to begin again at the beginning and consider what conditions are really best for little children are really best for all concerned.

I had already admitted that they fare more normally in the companionship of children of their own age than in solitary or semi-solitary confinement to the society of adults. The universal compassion for an only child is significant. Now, secondly, I reflected, it is true in every other department of human activity, that those who have learned how to do a thing can do it better than those who have not. The difference in the meaning of the words "profes-

sional" and "amateur" made this clear to my mind. "Amateur" means, in the first place, a person who does the thing in question out of love, just as a mother does; but it has emerged from constant daily use in our vocabulary with the added meaning of a person who does not do it very well. The statement, "An amateur carpenter put up that shelf," seldom means that it is an exceptionally good shelf. Whereas in every process, from paper-hanging to playing on the piano, the remark, "Let us get a professional to do it," means, "Let us have someone who understands the business and can dispatch it competently." It is, of course, apparent that this line of thought was rapidly pushing me towards the possibility that the fact of giving physical birth to a child might not change a woman into a real mother, but only into an amateur one.

It is certainly true that not all mothers are good ones. Only the other day I myself was instrumental in removing, by legal force, the three children of my washerwoman's cousin, because she was unfit to take care of them. Of course her case was extreme, half insane from drunkenness and vice as she is. The helpless little things might have been beaten and starved and, for all anyone knew, killed outright, if she had continued to have the entire charge of them. And yet she was physically the mother of them just as much as my mother was of her children. If I grant that this physical fact does not give her an inalienable right to care for

them as she thinks best, where is the line to be drawn? Will it not soon be drawn across my own circle of comfortable, well-to-do, middle-class families? And ought it not to be so drawn? How about that too high-strung friend of mine, who loves her children dearly, but who occasionally, under stress of some household complication, or one of her terrible headaches, gives way to an outbreak of temper? It is true that she does not beat her children over the head with her fists, as did the cousin of my washerwoman. But that is all a matter of degree. Her children, inheriting her sensitive nerves, are a thousand times more responsive than those of the poorer family. Was she not inflicting on their exquisite sensibilities the far worse torture of undeserved unhappiness? And that cousin of mine, easy-going, good-natured Cousin Sue, who was married for her good looks—how about the obvious fact that, with the best will in the world, she is quite incapable of supplying the amount of mental pabulum needed by those of her children who inherit their father's brains? Her boys and girls are getting oatmeal and beefsteak enough, but can anyone honestly deny that they are being starved? And finally, how about Aunt Molly—the Aunt Molly who is in everyone's family—masterful, too-devoted Aunt Molly, whose powerful personality is only resisted by the adult members of her family with feverish effort, and who, because she has no other exercise for this great and splendid gift of per-

sonality, perverts it in dominating the nascent individualities of her little children so overpoweringly that in several of them she has annihilated it altogether. She has not physically killed those children, it is true, but one has only to look at them to see that they are not wholly alive. Yes, absurd though the proposition seemed at first sight, it was apparent to me that, although we well-to-do mothers do not look in the least like my washerwoman's cousin, we are no more perfect and ideal mothers than she.

But, I asked myself, what can be done about it? Even though we do not do as well as we might, is there any reason to expect anything better in the future? I tried to put the question to myself honestly, suppressing, as well as I could, the instinctive anger I felt at the idea. "Could any other woman, trained though she might be, care for my children better than I?" I tried conscientiously to make a fair mental comparison of teachers and mothers. Is it possible that there are any elements in the teacher's training and in the nature of her contact with the children which, *in the future*, as her training is improved and the milieu in which she works is perfected, will do more than offset the extreme affection we mothers bear to our little ones, that passionate, personal attachment to them, which is all that, as a class, we have to offer as reasons why we should have the exclusive care of them.

In the first place, considering critically the circle

of my personal acquaintances, I was bound to admit that very frequently this extreme affection of mothers for their children does not result in a correspondingly extreme wisdom in their treatment. That fact is as obvious as it is melancholy. Almost without exception, all the mothers I know love their children to distraction, and yet some bring them up well, and others very badly. Evidently, the excellence of the child's preparation for life does not depend exclusively on his mother's affection, which is a practically unvarying factor in the situation, but largely on other qualities, which some mothers have and some do not. Is there any reason to think that in the long run a larger proportion of professionally trained teachers would have these other qualities?

One of the first answers to this question is that teachers, unlike mothers, consciously choose their profession and, if they feel that they have made a mistake and would be more useful as stenographers or bookkeepers, are for all practical purposes free to change their occupations without blame. Whereas American girls marry generally because they are in love, because they want a home, because someone is in love with them, because they are tired of work or of idleness, because they are ambitious, but seldom consciously in order to become mothers. As wives they accept, in most cases, with heartfelt gratitude the benediction of maternity, but as unmarried girls they are universally

trained (and possibly wisely trained) by the tradition of our society not to let their thoughts linger on this subject. As a consequence it must be admitted that the majority of them have the profession of motherhood imposed upon them without regard to their temperamental fitness for its arduous cares, and nearly always without the slightest preparation for it. The most poorly prepared teacher has learned more of the technic of her profession than the average young mother. Another difference between the teacher and the mother which occurred to me is that the teacher is not left alone, as most mothers are, to cope single-handed with the dizzying effects of illimitable power, proverbially too much for the strongest human heads. A teacher who only once, under no matter what stress of ill-health or nervous strain, loses her temper with the children, loses her job, because there is someone besides the children to know of the outbreak. If she is not well enough to do her day's work she is not forced like the amateur mother to do it badly because it must be done somehow; and the children are not forced to suffer for the perfectly excusable impatience and irritability which come from her ill-health. She is able to stay at home in bed and send word that a competent substitute be put in charge of her group of children.

Furthermore, she has and will have increasingly in the future infinitely better conditions to work with, a number of children together, educating them-

selves in a milieu especially intended for them, instead of the average adult home, intended primarily for adult-life, most of the equipment of which is unsuitable for children.

Finally, to her training for the work, to her natural aptitude for it (shown by her free choice of it), to her feeling that she can leave it if she finds she cannot do it well, to the steadying knowledge that her conduct with the children is under constant observation, and to the improved processes possible with a number of children together, she has added the obvious fact that in the course of even two or three years she has accumulated more practical experience in her profession than even the mother of seventeen children. How many such mothers have been heard to exclaim, "Oh, if I could only go back and begin over again! How many mistakes I would avoid!" The teacher of some experience is just that mother, able to begin over and over again, and to avoid with certainty the faults of the fumbling amateur.

If I am to give an honest account of myself, I must confess that at this point I was quite carried away by what I felt to be righteous primal instinct, coming from the very depths of human nature, a passionate, angry refusal longer to consider arguments which were leading me to conclusions not only inexpressibly painful, but which, I sincerely felt, would, in spite of their logical plausibility, injure human life more than aid it. I cried out that under

the conditions indicated nothing of value would be left of family life; that marriage would mean nothing; that those institutions, founded on the most sacred instincts of our hearts, should be allowed to stand without unhallowed pryings into their foundations. I turned my attention resolutely elsewhere and for some time thought no more about the whole puzzling question.

This dogged adherence to the sanctity of the *status quo* was broken down by the visit of a great-aunt of mine, who happened to arrive while the household was going through a siege of the measles. I noticed that Great-Aunt Victoria eyed with asperity the trim, quick-stepping, trained nurse, but I was quite unprepared for the bitterness of her outbreak when she suddenly turned on me one day with, "I don't know what the world's coming to! It seems to me as though folks weren't made of flesh and blood any more! I don't see what earthly satisfaction you get out of having a family and being married! At your age, I'd ha' marched that woman to the door and locked it behind her, long before this!"

I stared at her, entirely at a loss as to her meaning. We are all devoted to Miss Haines, the nurse, who has ushered all of the children into the world and has gone down to the gates of death with nearly every member of the family. Serious though the malady may be, we all feel that the worst is over when she steps quietly into the house with her reassuring

smile. My old relative went on, very pale, and shaking with an emotion which astounded me by its violence, "You modern mothers don't *love* your children any more—you *can't*—or you wouldn't let another woman step in and look out for them just when they are sick and need you the most! Why, there wasn't a child of mine who'd take a drop of medicine from any hand but mine!"

I began a hasty answer, amused by the patent inconsistency of her attitude—"But, Auntie, the trained nurse *can* take care of them better than I, when it is something serious. She has had the most splendid training and lots of experience into the bargain. Suppose after little Alice's operation I had refused to allow the nurse to care for the baby because I wanted to hold her in my arms every minute? Of course I wanted to! What if I did? What difference does it make what *I* want to do? what if——"

I stopped, transfixed by the arrow of a perfect analogy. And the next day, with a chastened spirit, took up once more my investigation of the direction in which modern society seems to be leading mothers. The prevailing mood in which I continued these colloquies with myself was one of dreary emptiness. If we mothers are not to devote our lives to our little ones, what are we to do? What will become of the family? What of the home?

A little historical study of the home and the family, which I had thought the most stable institutions in the

world, showed me, to my artless astonishment, that, on the contrary, they are kaleidoscopic in their flexible adjustment to the economic conditions about them. The only thing they have not done, in the course of centuries of metamorphosis, is to cease for an instant to exist. Not only does our twentieth-century home differ as widely as it is possible from the home in which the Romans under the Republic found happiness, and from the equally happy Chinese home of the present day, but it differs almost as widely from the American home at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The change from the home as a center for domestic industries to its present state of helpless dependence on factories is one that is familiar to all women. We have had it, in the language of our school-boy sons, "rubbed into us" with virulence that we modern American housekeepers are no longer the spinning, weaving, soap-making, pork-curing housewives of our great-grandmothers' time; and our idleness has not been the less flung in our teeth because we have protested with perfect justice that it is enforced, and that it would be the height of folly for us to weave linen slowly and imperfectly by hand, when we may buy, for a song, fine and regularly woven cloth, or to cure our own pork, when that method would cost more and be less reliable in its results than to buy pork cured by wholesale, scientific methods. As I ran over in my mind this familiar attack on modern married women, and our familiar defense, the idea

dawned on me that both attack and defense are beside the mark. It may be that we are being attacked, not because we do not labor productively in our home laboratories, but because we do not, as a class, labor productively anywhere?

I recalled with the vividness of all recollections of youth a summer in my adolescence when, through some exigencies of family affairs, my sisters and I and my girl cousins kept house together for several weeks, without any adult supervision. We parceled the work out in equal shares, like the miniature edition of society which we were, and would have lived together in perfect concord if it had not been for my Cousin Anna's lace centerpiece. I fairly laughed to myself as I remembered the youthful bitterness of our resentment of that piece of fancywork. Nobody had asked Anna to make it, certainly nobody had dreamed of suggesting that it be finished by a certain date. As a matter of fact, none of us had the slightest interest in it, except that before the end of the summer we all hated the sight of it, because it came to mean Anna's everlasting shirking of her share of the work in order to achieve those elaborate lace-stitches. Every scallop in it represented to us badly made beds, scamped dishwashing, and unswept floors. And yet none of us worked harder than Anna did, bending her back and straining her eyes over that self-imposed task.

The question now went home to me, whether I too were not being an Anna in the world of adults,

I with my tense life of "high-class" domesticity, with my careful ordering of our pretty home, and the two servants, with my attention to the way the table is set and the kind of clothes the children and I wear, and the sort of curtains which hang at our windows, and the refreshments I serve to our Bridge Club, and my endless conversations over the telephone, "arranging" this date and that of my social life, and "seeing to" all the details of the entertainment given at the Country Club for new furnishings for the ballroom there.

Like other reading Americans, I was perfectly familiar with the attacks on very wealthy women for their parasitic lives of entire idleness and pleasure seeking. Was it possible, I now asked myself, astonished that the madly hurrying occupations which fill the lives of all the rest of us hard-working middle-class American women are only another form of idleness, only lace-stitches which are of no interest to anyone but ourselves, and no value to anyone at all? Are we perhaps, like Anna, blinding ourselves to the fact that we are doing something not worth doing, by the simple process of doing it very hard and very fast? The fact that our intentions are the best possible does not make this disconcerting likeness any the less striking, for Anna had not the least conscious intention of making the rest of us work harder than we needed. She was one of the best-natured girls who ever lived. She simply could not see any connection between her

pretty, dainty, futile work and our potato-stained hands and flushed faces. It occurred to me that a great deal of the over-emphatic, crudely hostile, "socialistic" talk and writing, which I had lightly waved away as "malcontent" and "incendiary," resembled precisely the old angry powwows we girls used to have in the pantry about Anna and her embroidery hoop out on the front porch. Perhaps the angry growl of the world at prosperous modern married women is simply the inarticulate expression of an unformulated demand that we go out into the kitchen and bake the bread before we sit down to fancywork. And perhaps our reluctance to do productive work comes not from real laziness or a wish to shirk, but because we do not see that the work of the world has changed its form and is no longer, even for married women with families, found exclusively in the home.

I had begun far from this disconcerting idea, with a simple attempt to make a little sense out of a confusing situation, but, although I ended with an astonished recognition of my busy self as a parasitic member of society, the sequence of my reasoning was not surprising; for the question of the care of children is inextricably bound up with the economic position of women (a book phrase which means, "Are they Annas or not?") We modern prosperous matrons say, in substance, to society that we are mothers and hence cannot be expected to be in any other way productive members of society; and

we shut our eyes to the fact that a large share of what used to be the business of a mother has been taken away from us by the new organization of the community. Children over six are all at school now, six hours a day, for practically the rest of their lives up to maturity (and no one thinks of crying out "Communism, revoltingly applied to children!") We have not left to us, to occupy profitably those six hours, the necessary domestic activities of our great-grandmothers, and we have taken to filling our lives with the innocent but futile and profitless fancywork of household decoration, dinner-giving, entertainments, dancing, card-playing, following the fashions in dress—a hundred other occupations, none of which has any bearing on the fact that we are mothers, and hence no excuse for us in the face of society's demand that everybody shall do his fair share of the work.

It is true that these changed conditions are not our fault. We did not decree that knitting-machines should make it unprofitable for us to knit all the stockings for our children. And we ought not to be blamed for our inability to turn back the hands of the clock of economic development, so that we may continue to be sufficiently useful inside our homes to justify our existence to humanity. But we are to be blamed if we refuse to look facts in the face. There the conditions are. Or at least there they are rapidly tending. Like everyone else, we must accept them and make the best of them. Happy

the woman whose husband is so poor that her actual labor is honestly needed in the house. She is still in those halycon days of economic simplicity when a life-work lay before every woman because she was a woman and not a man. But woe to the prosperous woman, who, bewildered in the dark confusion of conditions about us, wastes and perverts her valuable productive energy on the elaboration of a social hierarchy, even a very tame middle-class social hierarchy, which bears as little relation to the sane, necessary interdependence of human beings as the hieroglyphic carvings on an Alaskan totem-pole to the ordered system of the Encyclopædia Britannica. The profession of being a mother nowadays actually absorbs all the energies of a woman, in the moderately prosperous classes, only during the babyhood of each child, which, in the case of the average small American family, means only a very few years out of the sixty or seventy which the mother lives. Let her look to it that she gives a good account of the rest!

We are aware that a very large part of the material work of "mothering," the preparation of food and garments from the crude, raw materials, and the care of the children during severe sickness, have been taken from us by the factory and the trained nurse. But we do not, as a class, grasp the fact that a considerable part of the other phases of mothering has also been taken away, even from the best of us, by the better-trained teacher and the more perfectly

equipped school. What child gets his teaching at his mother's knee nowadays? We would not dare to attempt it, for we know that he would rank far behind his fellows. Who of us would venture to teach arithmetic to our children, or physiology? We have not the outfit to make physics seem real to them or the apparatus to make geography understandable.

We may regret it, we may think it a step in the wrong direction, but for good or evil the change has come. The child now lives a great part of his life, and a very important part of his life, away from his home and his mother. And soon, so the signs of the time run, even the very little child will do this, and do it to his own advantage. With this change will go the last of our excuses for staying exclusively within the walls of the home. The first exodus was that of the father, who once had his cobbler's bench or his printing-press in one room of the common dwelling-house. He went away to the factory and the office. Then the older children went away to school, first the boys and then the girls. Later the younger ones followed their brothers and sisters, and every year takes them away to the teacher at a younger age. The mother stands bewildered at this desertion, which is none of her doing, and when she is unguided by the steadying press of economic necessity makes the pathetic effort to fill her life by the pretty decoration and comely ordering of the empty shell. The fact is that her work is no longer exclusively there. The home has

become a meeting-place—no longer a place where the family lives together. Frightened as we may be at the sound of those words, they ring in the ears of everyone who honestly considers the conditions about him.

In my own case I own to considerable faint-hearted blenching at the queer look of things before me, and I have been humbled to understand a historical person and an exclamation which I had always thought the typification of unprincipled cowardice. I am making a conscientious effort not to cry triumphantly, "After me the deluge!" but it is very hard to avoid some satisfaction in the extreme rapidity with which the children grow up. No matter how soon the change may come, I myself could not better matters by leaving home to do office-work, and having my children brought up by another woman. My own children will have passed their infancy under my own eyes.

And yet—and yet—I see other sides to the matter. For one thing, I am oddly comforted by Great-Aunt Victoria's horror over our dear Miss Haines, the nurse, whom I know so well to be one of the sweetest elements in our family life. I may be needlessly frightening myself over the prospect of the introduction into family life of elements which the next generation will find as beneficent as we do the trained nurse.

Furthermore, a solution of my difficulties as simple as Columbus' egg occurs to me. The new order

of things will not mean, cannot mean, that all women will do other work than care for little children. Someone must do this. If society ordains that children shall leave the amateur home for the professional school, why should not the mothers travel there after them? Why in the world should there be a tacit understanding in America that "teacher" means a childless spinster? "Teacher," in any broad significance of the word, should mean only "mother-by-choice," a woman, who, of her own free will, chooses to devote her life to the training of children, and who has systematically prepared herself to care for them in the best possible way. She should be the mother-by-choice of the children of the world, leaving the many mothers-by-chance to do other useful parts of the work of the community for which they may be more fitted. Why should not the antagonism between "teacher" and "mother" be ended by the simple expedient of fusing the two characters into one? Why should not the real "born mothers" become the teachers? In the future, why should not those of us who have a passion for maternity and all that it means devote ourselves even more to children than we do now under the present narrowly parochial system of confining our efforts to the children of our own family? If we show ourselves capable of being trained fully and fitly for the great and splendid task of caring for the young, may we not become the mothers-by-choice, not only of our own children, but of those of the mothers who

though they all love their babies, have strong intellectual, artistic, or temperamental interests elsewhere. Will not the children of the world ultimately be gathered together in small groups for most of the day, cared for by scientifically trained mothers-by-choice, who benefit not only their own little ones, but the whole of the human race by their natural fitness for the undertaking? And they will have among the children under their care sons and daughters of their own flesh and blood. Why not?

In short, I cannot close this unscientific and sketchy disquisition upon a great theme without bearing witness to the faith which, after all my alarm, I find deeply rooted in my heart—the faith that just as our family life is as sweet to us in its changed modern form as that of our grandparents was to them, so our grandchildren will find in their children, as we do in ours, the most comforting and consoling answer to the riddle of existence; and that they will cherish their little ones as tenderly as we, perhaps even more so, because they will apply more definitely than we to their duties as parents that clear-sighted use of the brain which has been, on the whole, the only safe guide to justice and even to mercy in the complex human relations of humanity.

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